



# AGA Career Development Program

## Guidelines for Mentees

### Overview

The goal of the Career Development Program (CDP) is to promote the career development of, and provide networking opportunities for, junior gastroenterologists and researchers. It is anticipated that the mentor with whom you have been matched will share with you his/her experiences and advise you on such topics as

- promotion and tenure,
- budget writing,
- grant writing,
- research design and funding, curriculum development and evaluation,
- resident teaching and evaluation,
- time management skills,
- presentation skills,
- communication skills,
- practice management,
- medicolegal issues, and
- negotiating contracts.

This advice pertains in particular to careers in gastroenterology, but may include other topics such as meshing career and personal life. You may (and should) have other mentors guide you for other needs (e.g., the tenure process at your particular university). Successful mentoring involves a dynamic process whereby each participant learns to respect and trust his/her partner's commitment, expertise, and individuality. A firm commitment to the mentoring process and a willingness to invest time and energy are the most important components for a successful relationship. Mentoring is in many ways an elusive concept and an individual process. Every colleague pair is unique because each partner's experience personality and professional development agenda will differ. Both partners begin the process with high expectations and uncertainty about how to proceed. You might consider setting up a formal agreement with your mentor to help

minimize any opportunities for misunderstandings.

Following are some guidelines for mentees to consider to help foster an effective mentoring relationship.

### Participation in Professional Organization

Your career development is ideally achieved by your growing participation in the digestive health organizations that are more appropriate for your career path. Thus, if you are not already a member, you should arrange to join one or more of the appropriate digestive health organizations either as a trainee or as a full member. Your mentor can assist you with that process if necessary. When the timing is appropriate in your career path (your mentor can discuss this with you), consider volunteering for service on a committee of the appropriate society. Each of the digestive health organizations encourages younger members to get involved with society activities. This is a very good way for a junior colleague to continue networking with other scientists and clinicians besides his/her formal mentor.

Most importantly attending the annual Digestive Disease Week meeting provides an ideal time and place for you to interact with your mentor. You may decide to have breakfast, lunch, coffee, or dinner together, as well as attend poster sessions or workshops on career development or research funding strategies. Other ways for you to interact with your mentor include phone, letter, Fax, and e-mail.

### Mentor/Mentee Contact

Your mentor has been encouraged to make the initial contact in the relationship, however it is also appropriate for you to introduce yourself to your mentor through a phone call, letter or e-mail if you wish. You

might suggest potential topics you would like to discuss at a future time.

Although the frequency of contacts between mentors and mentees will vary from mentoring pair to mentoring pair based on the needs and interests of the individuals, it is recommended that contact be made a minimum of once every two months. The extent of the interactions can range from a brief e-mail or phone call (to just “check in”), to a more lengthy interaction that begins or follows up on a specific need (e.g., advice on interviewing for jobs.)

## **How to Interact with your Mentor**

- Ask for advice and welcome constructive criticism; do not assume that advice will be offered if it is not solicited. Be as specific as possible when asking for advice. A good mentor will offer both criticism and suggestions for your work, so be open to both.
- Be considerate of your mentor’s time. Return phone calls, e-mail messages or faxes promptly and be on time. On any specific occasion ask how much time your mentor has to spend with you and abide strictly by that request. Let your mentor suggest taking extra time if needed.
- Listen attentively to what your mentor has to say. Although sometimes advice may seem irrelevant to you, often the information will become useful at some future date.
- Seriously consider the advice given to you by your mentor, even if your immediate reaction is not positive. Beginning a response to advice or criticism with the words, “Yes, but...” is often a bad way to start.

- Show appreciation for the time and assistance given to you by your mentor. Mentors need encouragement too, and constructive feedback will help your mentor guide you in the most effective way.
- Make only positive or neutral comments about your mentors to others. If, after a period of time, you do not believe that either you or your mentor are able to participate in an effective mentoring relationship, then don’t be adverse to discussing this with your mentor and possibly ending the relationship. If this occurs, the CDP Committee and staff can assist in placing you in a relationship with a different mentor who may be a better match. In this vein, it may be helpful for you to annually review your relationship with your mentor. If the relationship does end, if at all possible, try to end the relationship on good terms.
- Keep the lines of communication open with your mentor. You never know when you may need his or her advice or assistance at some point in the future. And later, when the formal mentoring relationship is no longer needed (for example, you have obtained tenure or other official recognition of career advancement), consider staying in touch to provide “progress” reports.

## **Expectations**

Mentors have the right to expect that you will: meet or make contact as often as originally agreed upon, ask for advice, listen thoughtfully, advise him/her about results, keep confidences, and reevaluate the mentoring agreement annually.