



AGA Career Development Program

Guidelines for Mentors

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. The CDP is very appreciative of your participation in this program. As a mentor, it is anticipated that you will share with your junior colleague your experiences and advice on such topics as promotion and tenure, budget writing, research design, curriculum development, resident teaching, graduate student teaching, time management skills, communication skills, presentation skills and negotiating contracts. This advice pertains in particular to careers in gastroenterology, but could include other topics such as meshing career with personal life. Your mentee may (and should) have other mentors for guidance on other needs (e.g., the tenure process at his/her particular university). In return, your participation in the program should expand your professional contacts, possibly leading to the establishment of new collaborative opportunities, and provide an important contribution to your digestive health organization and to the profession of gastroenterology.

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 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 mentee to help minimize any opportunities for misunderstanding.

Following are some general suggestions to help your mentoring relationship. Since mentoring relationships come in all shapes and

sizes, what we offer are only guidelines, and you may want to review these protocols with your mentee to help decide which are important in your specific relationship. In addition, there are now numerous books, pamphlets and other published materials that address issues related to effective mentor/mentee relationships. The CDP Committee and its staff can assist you if you are interested in obtaining such materials.

Participation in Professional Organizations

The goal of the CDP is ideally achieved in the setting of your mentee's increasing participation in the digestive health organization that is most appropriate for his/her career. Thus, your mentee should be encouraged to join the appropriate organizations and attend Digestive Disease Week meetings on an annual basis. This is also a very good opportunity for you and your mentee to interact personally, over breakfast, lunch, coffee, or dinner, and at poster sessions or workshops on career development or reaching funding strategies. Other ways for you to interact with your mentee include e-mail, phone, letters, and fax. Encourage your mentee to attend, if possible, specialty meetings in his/her discipline and other events that would help advance his/her career, such as workshops on research funding and practice strategies.

Mentor/Mentee Contact

Take the initiative in the start of the relationship. Introduce yourself through a phone call, letter or e-mail, or invite your mentee to meet if geography permits. Suggest potential topics to discuss then or at a future time, and ask if there is any specific advice that your mentee is seeking.

Although the frequency of contacts between mentors and mentees will vary from mentoring pairs to mentoring pairs based on the needs of the individuals, it is recommended that contact be made a minimum of once every two months. Either member of the pair can initiate the contacts. 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 Mentee

- Ask and encourage accomplishments.
- Respect your mentee’s time as much as you respect your own.
- Be explicit about your own needs and limits, specifying times you wish not to be disturbed or ones that are particularly good for communication.
- Be explicit with your mentee that you are only offering suggestions and that they should be weighed along with advice received from other mentors.
- Make only positive or neutral comments about your mentee to others. Your mentee must trust that anything said to you will be held in the strictest of confidence unless they instruct you otherwise.
- If your mentee is interested, consider discussing how you have been able to balance work with personal life demands. Junior scientists and practitioners often find this a difficult issue and set unrealistic expectations for themselves and their personal lives. They appreciate hearing a senior colleague’s thoughts and experiences.
- It is important not to confuse positive communications with a need for unwarranted praise or flattery. A mentor’s job is not always to praise the work of the junior colleague. In fact, mentors who do not offer critical feedback may actually provide a disservice to the person they are trying to help. Too often senior faculty do not offer criticism for fear of offending. This has been found to be a particular problem when senior male faculty mentor junior female faculty. Men may worry that criticism of a female mentee will be interpreted as hostility towards women.
- While accepting criticism is an important lesson to be learned by all junior faculty, giving constructive criticism is a lesson

senior faculty must master to become successful mentors. When criticism is offered, it should be followed by constructive advice for improvement. If possible, specific examples should be offered. Try to avoid offering advice in a way that would intimidate your young colleagues from best availing themselves to your expertise. For example, were you to say to your junior colleague, “You should have followed the Nesbitt protocol for that experiment. Of course you are familiar with that protocol, aren’t you?” It is unlikely that he/she would ever admit ignorance, for fear of your thinking poorly of him/her. Offer specific suggestions, and let your junior colleague stop you from detailing your suggestions if he/she already understands your point. Alternatively, provide a reference that you both agree to review for discussion at your next meeting.

- If, after a period of time, you don’t believe that either you or your mentee are able to participate in an effective mentoring relationship, then don’t be adverse to discussing this with your mentee and possibly ending the relationship. If this occurs, the CDP Committee and staff can assist in placing the junior colleague 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 mentoring relationship with the junior colleague. If the relationship does end, if at all possible, try not to end the relationship on bad terms.

Expectations

Based on these protocols your mentee should reasonably expect that you: be in regular contact, provide career planning advice, keep confidences between the two of you, follow through on commitments, and be caring while giving honest feedback.