



The Pivotal Role of Mentorship in Orthopedic Surgery Residencies

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The role of a mentor is first described in Homer's *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus entrusts Mentor with the care of his family.¹ During the 20 years in which Odysseus is gone, Mentor becomes a teacher to Odysseus' son Telemachus, providing wisdom and guidance.

Historically, mentoring has been thought of as the interaction between a protégé and a more experienced individual. While this remains true, an effective and meaningful mentorship is a considerably more intimate experience—one between 2 individuals that involves an ongoing relationship of learning, dialogue, and challenge to facilitate both career and personal development. Although both formal and informal approaches to mentoring have been described, the underlying principles of the mentor-mentee relationship remain the same.

The corporate world has embraced mentorship programs, with 76% of *Fortune* magazine's 100 best companies to work for in America offering mentoring programs, as compared with 56% of the rest.² The benefits have included better job satisfaction, improved personal and professional development, higher wages, and employee retention.

Mentorship has traditionally been more limited in medicine, despite its recognized role in establishing an effective medical and surgical educational environment.^{3,4} Wilson⁵ describes the barriers to effective mentoring in medicine, which include a culture that is not conducive to seeking help, time constraints, the inability of any one person to provide all of the support required for a single individual, deficiencies in mentoring skills, and a lack of institutional support. These impediments are challenging but must be addressed if successful mentoring is to occur in medicine.

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The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons values mentorship, as evidenced by its development of the Leadership Fellows Program and the Washington Health Policy Fellowship. Despite the Academy's support of such programs, a survey of orthopedic surgery residents revealed that only 52% of the respondents were involved in a formal mentorship.⁶ And of those, only 17% were highly satisfied with the mentoring environment in place at their respective programs.⁶

I have developed invaluable relationships with several faculty members who have become my mentors. And as I

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grow as an orthopedic surgery resident, entering my final years of postgraduate training, my appreciation for those individuals becomes greater and greater. These individuals are not only responsible for my development and maturation, but also for shaping my subspecialty interests and career goals.

Admittedly, I am part of the 52% mentioned above, as I am in a residency program with a formal mentorship program. Faculty who are well respected by their colleagues and patients alike and who are devoted to resident education and well-being are chosen by our residency program director to participate. Residents are matched with a mentor in July of their internship year and meet numerous times throughout each academic year, both inside and outside the hospital. There are also many other faculty members and senior residents that have been available to teach, guide, and provide advice. They too act as mentors and must therefore be recognized.

My formal mentor is a foot and ankle surgeon, Dr. John DiPreta, who immediately became someone I sought to emulate. I attribute this to his positive attitude, compassion, and care for patients, no matter what the circumstances are. His enthusiasm and appreciation for orthopedic foot and ankle surgery have also always been inspiring, leading me to pursue a career in this same subspecialty. He is a physician who leads by example, undoubtedly making him a role model. Moreover, Dr. DiPreta's commitment to my individual growth as a physician and to assisting me in accomplishing my goals also makes him my mentor.

Dr. Richard Uhl is our residency program's leader. He is also a mentor to me, as well as to each of the residents in our program. His ability to teach, motivate, and challenge others and myself is unparalleled, as is his devotion to the residency program. Dr. Uhl has played an invaluable role in my training, is always available for advice, and is a positive presence during difficult times.

I have always wanted to reflect on these relationships, as they have been so crucial to my development, pursuits,

and aspirations. I encourage all residents to partake in a mentorship and am an advocate of formal mentorship programs within all residencies. The benefits of such relationships cannot be refuted, as mentors will undoubtedly facilitate the effective growth of the next generation of orthopedic surgeons.

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