

Medical students need academic coaching. Make the most of it.

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Athletes deemed “coachable” tend to have the most success. Why? The theory goes that they can take their natural abilities and refine them as well as work on their weaknesses.

When it comes to academic coaching in medical school, that same logic applies to medical students. Those who are eager to self-improve—and prepare for coaching sessions accordingly—will get the most out of interactions with an academic coach.

The AMA’s “Coaching in Medical Education: A Faculty Handbook,” offers a framework for educators and administrators who create programs for coaching medical students.

AMA Wire® spoke with Sandy Ngo Moubarek, a second-year medical student at the University of California, Davis School of Medicine, a member of the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium. Ngo Moubarek recently started working with an academic coach. She offered a few insights on how students can maximize their academic coaching sessions.

Look beyond testing

In coaching, as in many settings, coaches are advised to create long- and short-term goals using the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely) framework. That doesn’t mean, however, that your goals need to be restricted to academic and performance metrics.

“I picked the goal of exploring my career,” Ngo Moubarek said. “We went over how I can measure that, and if it is realistic. It was really helpful. As a second year, a common goal you are going to have is to prepare for the [USMLE Step 1 exam].”

“In this situation, I didn’t emphasize that,” she said. “I didn’t want my coaching experience to just be about my Step score. I wanted to strengthen my personal and professional -development. I hope to improve my interpersonal skills that would make me a better student and future clinician. For me, that

was exploring more deeply a specialty that had personal impact. In terms of a tangible goal they wanted me to talk to at least two professionals in the specialty before my Step 1 dedicated study time.”

Be proactive

Know what you want, and ask for a coach to help you. Keep in mind, a coach isn't there to be your mentor or your teacher. The coach's purpose is to equip the learner with self-awareness and hold them accountable.

“It really is more that the student is leading the session,” Ngo Moubarek said. “I am able to share with my coach who I am, what I value most, what I struggle with, and how I can set realistic goals that encompasses those factors. -

“My biggest takeaway from my coaching experience, so far, is that a coaching session is designed to allow you to develop more self-reflection and learn how to adapt to certain things without losing your core. It's not about stepping out of your comfort zone but expanding your comfort zone.”

Work to understand your strengths, weaknesses

A coach provides an objective assessment of what you will bring to the table as a physician and how that might play out in a clinical setting.

“I'm very open and honest,” Ngo Moubarek said. “It's easy for me to be vulnerable and share my experiences. With my coach, she valued that. She told me we had a 'dear diary' moment. She advised that in terms of when you go into your specialty, be mindful of the space and the people that you are having these moments with.

“Because while the health system strives to promote wellness and encourages relationship building with both patients and colleagues on an individual level, in any professional setting first impressions are important,” she added. “I appreciated that insight. Because it serves as a reminder that building relationships does not require me to have 'dear diary' moments with everyone, as it might be off-putting to others.”