International Medical Graduates (IMG) toolkit: Mentorship

Mentorship can help students hone clinical skills and improve patient interactions, but mentors also guide students through tough times both in school and their personal lives. Mentors guide students in clinical skills training and patient interactions and check in with students regularly to make sure they’re doing well personally.

Mentor-mentee relationships can be enhanced by factors which

1. Focus.
2. Prioritize.
3. Capitalize.
4. Stretch goals to stretch experience.

The Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education in the 2018 Common Program

Requirements mentioned that the training programs must provide an individualized learning plan at least annually. The program must provide a system to assist residents in this process, including faculty mentorship to help residents create learning goals and systems to track and monitor progress toward completing the individualized learning plan.

Mentoring diverse medical students for an academic career

In a study done by Sanchez et al., they found that out of 601 minorities resident and fellows (including IMGs), 64% had an interest in academic medicine and 51% didn’t have sufficient guidance to develop a publishable project.¹

Another study found that from a residents’ survey of 183 participants, the majority stated that racial and ethnic minority and women respondents, unlike their counterparts, expressed a desire and perceived value in having access to concordant individuals to serve as mentors.²
From these studies, we can conclude that it is essential in the pathway of academic medicine for mentees to have one or more mentors who can guide them.

Mentoring can play a significant role in addressing the lack of minority faculty and students at academic health care institutions. It provides "an avenue for interaction and camaraderie" amongst underrepresented trainees, faculty and staff. While gender and ethnic similarities between the mentor and mentee are essential factors, non-minority mentors "seem to understand and appreciate minority students' perspective and have volunteered to serve as mentors for these students."3

Types of mentoring models

1. Peer mentoring (IMeRGE Initiative)
2. Mentors & sponsors (Leadership Acceleration Initiative)
3. PRIMEs mentorship
4. Big Brother programs
5. Others

Mentor search

One of the most critical tasks to have is a good mentor search. There are different ways to achieve this process. For example, mentors can be found through academic institutions, academic societies, regional or national meetings, on websites, using social media or using medical journals, among other resources.

Social media has become a great way to find mentors and coaches. Preferred professional platforms are Twitter and LinkedIn, but other platforms can be of use.

Mentor initial encounter

After finding the right mentor, mentees need to be prepared for the initial encounter. It is essential to use some strategies to have success in the mentoring relationship. The recommended approach is to:

1. Begin with the end in mind.
2. Work on the background and homework before a meeting.
3. Meet regularly.
4. Create a timeline.
5. Be consistent in meetings.
6. Foster collegial and professional behavior.

Resources to prepare for this initial encounter can be found on specialty websites (e.g., American College of Physicians, American Medical Association, etc.) or through Google. It is very important to know how to set S.M.A.R.T. Goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) and establish them from the first meeting.

Continuing the mentor-mentee relationship

After establishing the relationship with the mentor, there can be some mentoring challenges. Mentees always need to reassess goals periodically, refocus plans to meet needs (flexibility) and recommit with a mentor.

Definitions

Academic medicine: A combination of clinical care, research and teaching the next generation to improve patient lives. In other words, translating passion into scholarly activities. It can be any scholarly activities, including scientific work or social help.

Coach: A person who teaches or instructs someone.

Mentee: The person to be trained. Mentees can have several mentors (career, research, etc.).

Mentor: An experienced and trusted adviser that will guide others in their pathway.

Sponsor: A person or organization who provides funds or support for activities carried out by others.

Conclusion

For an International Medical Graduate, it is very important to have one or more mentors. There is an increased possibility of success in the mentor-mentee relationship if the mentors have something in common with the mentee, but this is not the most essential characteristic. The AMA’s IMG Section is a great way to start a network and to find good mentors. Contact the IMG Section for a mentor referral.
Learn more about the AMA member group International Medical Graduates Section and get involved in policy decision-making for issues affecting IMG physicians.

References


2 Sánchez N et al. LGBT Health Professionals Perspectives on Academic Careers – Facilitators and Challenges. LGBT Health December 2015, 2(4); 346-56.