

By Jennifer Sorrell, MD

Mentorship has always been a key focus of the Women's Dermatologic Society. In fact, "the mission of the Women's Dermatologic Society is to be the premier organization cultivating personal and professional development of dermatologists dedicated to excellence in patient care, mentorship, volunteerism, and leadership." [1]

I was excited to write an article about the importance of mentorship, as it has been key to my young career as a pediatric dermatologist. Someone took an interest in guiding me and molding my training, which is quite special. I think back to when I was a pediatrics resident, who by chance took a pediatric dermatology elective that forever changed my career. I had unknowingly stumbled upon a flagship in pediatric dermatology at Northwestern's Children's Memorial Hospital. Dr. Amy Paller, unbeknownst to me a world-renowned expert, took the time to guide and mentor me. What a lucky coincidence. I had stumbled upon the WDS 2006 Mentor of the Year.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a mentor as 'a trusted counselor or guide'. The idea of mentorship has a long history, dating back to Greek mythology. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus leaves to fight the Trojan War, and entrusted the care of his home and son, Telemachus, to his friend Mentor. Mentor was a teacher and person of wisdom for Telemachus. After the war, Odysseus was banished to wander for 10 years. The goddess of wisdom and battle, Athena, takes on the outward appearance of Mentor as a disguise to be able to guide Telemachus to find out what happened to his father. This is thought to be where the term mentor comes from. [2].

Mentorship is an essential element in one's evolving dermatologic career. Admani S et al targeted 115 board certified pediatric dermatologists to evaluate important motivating factors that influenced their career choice. "The vast majority of respondents noted mentorship as the most important influence on their decision to pursue a career in pediatric dermatology." [3] Not only is a mentor crucial to help avoid potentially consequential mistakes, but they can also guide others based on their prior experience. A good mentor should be able to listen, provide feedback effectively, and motivate their mentee. [4] We spoke to Dr Roopal Kundu, associate professor of dermatology and medical education at Northwestern University on her thoughts on mentorship. Dr Kundu has served as a mentor for the WDS mentorship award program from 2010-2012, 2015 and 2017. "Mentorship is a privilege. It is a special relationship you hold with an evolving learner in order to give them guidance and help them reach their personal best and goals. Open and transparent conversations where both the mentor and mentee can speak candidly and truthfully about their experiences, goals, hurdles, and personal story" are key elements to a successful mentorship.

Mentorship allows a mentee to become confident in their work, facilitates selection of a productive career as well as provides personal and professional support. This relationship is beneficial for both the mentor and mentee and is flexible; changing as each person advances and grows. Dr. Bernice Kwong, clinical associate professor of dermatology at Stanford University, is a 2017 mentor for a WDS mentorship awardee. She notes “that my greatest mentors have taught me, not only through the words of advice that they share with me, but also through constant modeling of behavior, character and action. When I witness a mentor actively living out the advice that they give, I know their advice is genuine and real, and thus it is more impactful and inspiring. Having these great mentors has been helpful in motivating me to make sure to model any advice in my daily work as much as I teach it”. [5]

There are multiple venues available to help one find a mentor. While mentorships were more traditionally thought of as localized to one’s own institution, long-distance mentorships have emerged, especially to address diversity in mentorship and gaps in availability of mentors in certain locations. Blattner et al provides a list of dermatology leadership and mentorship opportunities in their 2015 JAAD article. [6]. The WDS mentorship award [<https://www.womensderm.org/awards/award-programs/mentorship-award-program>] was created to promote the importance of mentorship within the WDS as well as establish long-term relationships between mentors and mentees that might otherwise not be possible. In addition, the WDS has partnered with Avon’s Skin Care Institute to provide the Avon Cosmetic Mentorship Program. [<http://www.womensderm.org/awards/award-programs/wds-and-avon-cosmetic-mentorship-program>]

Thank you to all of the wonderful mentors who have given their time and effort to help the next generation succeed. Your words of wisdom, guidance and support are appreciated beyond what words can say.



Dr. Amy Paller

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