

AMERICAN MEDICAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Medical Student Mentorship Guide



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INTRODUCTION

Why we created this guide

As we are sure you have experienced in your path to medical school thus far, there is a lot of information and advice passed by word of mouth, given by advisors and other medical students, or even found on stress-inducing websites (you know which ones we are talking about). Medical school is full of questions, whether they are about the curriculum, career options, finding balance, or managing stressors. One of the best ways to navigate these questions and challenges is to create a team of mentors that will support you and enable you to succeed. This is why AMWA created this guide to mentorship. As you go through this guide, our hope is that you feel more prepared to create a network that will help you become the wonderful doctor that you are striving to be.



The importance of mentorship

Throughout your journey to medicine, it is likely that you have had a mentor to guide, support, and encourage you along the way. What did that mentor provide? What made them effective or ineffective? In this section of the mentorship guide, we are going to walk through the importance of good mentorship and highlight some ways to maximize your mentor-mentee relationship to help you avoid some common pitfalls.

Mentorship can take many forms, so it is important to define what it means to you. A committee designed to study the science of effective mentorship in STEM combined over 50 definitions of the word to create the following definition:

Mentorship is a professional, working alliance in which individuals work together over time to support the personal and professional growth, development, and success of the relational partners through the provision of career and psychosocial support (Dahlberg et al., 2019).

In this definition, they describe mentorship as a “working alliance,” which emphasizes the reciprocal, dynamic nature of a mentor-mentee relationship. This contrasts previous ideas of mentorship that focus only on what a mentor can give to a mentee. As an aspiring physician, taking an active role in your mentor-mentee relationship will be key to ensuring the success of the mentorship. But how do you find the right mentor and build a relationship? First, it is important to identify what you need from a mentor.

Below are some common reasons that medical students seek out mentorship:

- Career Advice
- Study Tips
- Clinical Skills
- Letter of Recommendation
- Shadowing
- Finding Balance
- Life outside of Medicine
- Residency Application Advice
- Learning more about different areas of medicine

While this list is by no means exhaustive, the important thing is to identify what you personally are seeking from a mentor. Once you have defined what you desire in mentorship, you can begin your search for a mentor that will be able to help you in these areas. This might be a classmate, older student, resident or attending physician. Rather than relying on one person, it can be helpful to have multiple mentors to advise you on different aspects of your life and career. If you have multiple areas for which you are seeking mentorship, then don't wait to find the perfect mentor that fills all of your needs. Instead, recognize the strengths and limitations of each potential mentor's skill set and look to fill the gaps with additional mentorship as needed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP...

Now that you have identified your goals as a mentee, the next step is to define the mentor-mentee relationship. Although it is often overlooked, this step is crucial in establishing a valuable mentorship. Mentorship is founded on “an agreement on goals, an assignment of task or a series of tasks, and the development of bonds” (Bordin, 1979). Agreeing to become a mentor takes time, energy, and a longitudinal commitment, so it’s crucial that you ask your potential mentor directly if they would be willing to serve in this role. A lack of this acknowledgement is a precursor to pitfalls in a mentor-mentee relationship.

To avoid this, here are some recommendations for communicating with a mentor as well as recommendations on how to be an effective mentee:

- **Be direct about your goals for mentorship and what you are hoping to receive from the mentor.** Not knowing what you need from the relationship or what you expect from your potential mentor creates a poor foundation for mentorship that can leave both mentor and mentee unsatisfied. (See the “Determining your goals” section).
- **Take an active role in your mentorship.** Proactively set meeting times and be flexible to your mentor’s schedule. If applicable, work with administrative assistants to find times that work best for both you and your mentor.
- **Be prepared when meeting with your mentor.** Don’t expect the mentor to anticipate what you need. Come with questions and an outline for your expectations of a meeting.
- **Strive to make the relationship a “working alliance.”** What ways can you help your mentor to make the relationship mutually beneficial?

Unlike mentorship in other careers, mentorship in medicine evolves over time. You will transition from student to colleague. Ensuring that your mentorship relationships are healthy will be important for maintaining longitudinal connections. This may come in the form of periodic updates or an acknowledgement of appreciation for the helpful advice they have given you along the way. Expressing gratitude can go a long way in helping to cement a positive impression on those who have mentored you long after your mentor-mentee relationship has ended.

Characteristics of mentors and mentees

In a mentor-mentee relationship, both mentors and mentees have responsibilities to uphold. Mentors are expected to be accessible, responsive, and supportive, and should offer guidance and feedback in a timely and constructive manner. They should respect their mentee's goals, values, and individuality while advocating for their success and well-being. Mentees are expected to take the initiative in seeking guidance, should actively listen to their mentor's advice, and should implement feedback to facilitate their growth. They should also show appreciation for their mentor's time and expertise, demonstrate gratitude, and acknowledge their support and guidance.

For mentors:

Committing to be a mentor entails more than just occasional advice-giving. It involves a dedication to supporting the personal and professional development of mentees over an extended period. This commitment may include regular meetings or check-ins to discuss goals, progress, and challenges. It also requires being available to provide guidance, encouragement, and feedback as needed. A mentor plays a crucial role in fostering their mentee's growth and helping them navigate the complexities of medical school and beyond.

- Plan for regular meetings or check-ins:
 - These check-ins can be in person, via video call, or by email.
 - Establish a schedule for regular meetings to discuss progress, goals, and challenges.
 - Be flexible in scheduling to accommodate both mentor and mentee availability.
 - Have a clear communication about expectations regarding the frequency and format of meetings.
- Be willing to use personal experiences and insight to guide the mentee:
 - Share relevant personal experiences and insights that may resonate with the mentee and provide valuable lessons,
 - Be transparent about your successes, failures, and lessons learned throughout your medical journey.
 - Offer perspectives and reflections that can help the mentee gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that he/she might encounter.
- Be committed to maintaining confidentiality and professionalism in all interactions:
 - Respect the confidentiality of sensitive information that was shared by the mentee and maintain professional boundaries in all interactions.
 - Uphold the highest standard for professionalism, integrity, and ethics in mentor-mentee relationships.
 - Demonstrate respect, empathy, and understanding when communicating with your mentee to create a safe and supportive environment for open dialogue and growth.

For mentors cont:

- Be available to provide advice, guidance, and support:
 - Give advice and support, whether it's answering questions or providing feedback on exam scores, USMLE prep, how to get prepared for clinicals, or how to ace each rotation.
 - Respond to the mentee's inquiries or requests for assistance in a reasonable time frame.
 - Be open to offering emotional support and encouragement during a challenging time.
- Set clear expectations and goals:
 - Collaborate with your mentee to establish clear expectations and goals for the duration of the interaction.
 - Define specific objectives to work towards together to ensure alignment with your mentee's aspirations and needs.
 - Regularly revisit and reassess the goals to track the progress.
- Encourage accountability and self-reflection:
 - Encourage your mentee to take ownership of their learning process by setting goals then have them reflect on the experiences and steps that were taken, and identify any areas that require change for growth.
 - Hold them accountable for their commitments and actions, while also providing them with the support and encouragement they might need along the way.
 - Create a culture of continuous learning and improvement, where both mentor and mentee can actively engage in the process of personal and professional development.

For Mentees:

- Know your goals:
 - Setting goals looks different for every person, but goals should be something concrete and measurable. For example, you could set a goal to get a certain score on a standardized exam that is based on the programs you are interested in applying to.
- Determine what you want from your mentor based on what is important to you:
 - Your mentor is just one person and is not an expert in everything! Consider where their strengths lie and what is most helpful for you considering the resources that your school offers.
- Be organized and persistent: show up with an agenda, follow up if you haven't heard back from your mentor, and respond promptly.
- Create a mentorship team: seek out different mentors for different goals.
- Be honest with your mentor.
- Take initiative in seeking guidance, asking questions, and setting goals.
- Actively listen to your mentor's advice and incorporate feedback into personal and professional development.
- Respect your mentor's time and expertise by being punctual and prepared for meetings.
- Show appreciation for your mentor's support and guidance through gratitude.

Determine your goals

When it comes to finding mentors, you first need to determine your mentorship needs. Often, mentors are for academic or career advice: succeeding in pre-clinicals and clinicals, determining specialty, or finding research opportunities. It is also possible to have mentors for things outside of medicine as well, including community service, relationships while becoming a doctor, or managing other interests.

What is important to you? advocacy, education, faith, family, specialty, certain clinical skills, research, work-life balance

What goals do you have in the categories you determined important?

What kind of people can help you accomplish these goals?

Finding faculty mentors

Like most things mentorship-related, faculty advisors have the potential to be amazing resources, as long as you know how to utilize them.

Finding and Reaching Out to Potential Mentors:

When asking someone to be a mentor, it's essential to approach the conversation with respect and sincerity. Start by expressing your admiration for their accomplishments and expertise in the field of medicine. Share your genuine interest in learning from their experiences and insights. Be clear about your intentions and the specific areas in which you hope to receive guidance. Acknowledge the time commitment involved in mentorship and assure them that you value their time and expertise. Ultimately, make it clear that you're seeking a mentor-mentee relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and a shared commitment to personal and professional growth.

Tips:

- Be prepared. Research your mentor beforehand to come up with an idea of what they are already doing that you would like to learn more about.
- Reach out with a respectful and professional tone.
- Introduce yourself! Tell them your background, your path to medical school, and what is important to you.
- Express genuine interest in their experiences and expertise in the field of medicine.
- Highlight specific reasons why they would be an excellent mentor.
- Mention your three goals that you have reflected on and ask if they would be willing to help you accomplish them.
- Discuss how frequently you want to meet with them. Be clear about the time commitment and the expectations involved.
- Let them know that you are open to adjustments, and keep open communication about your schedule.

REACHING OUT...

Subject: Request for Mentorship Meeting

Dear [Mentor's Name],

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is [Name], and I am currently a [Year] at [Institution]. [Optional: I also serve as [Leadership Role/Position], which has deepened my interest in [specific area or focus].] I am reaching out because I am very interested in connecting with you to discuss [specific mentorship goal, e.g., career advice, research guidance, etc.].

Your experience in [specific field or skill you admire] really aligns with what I am hoping to learn, and I believe your insights would be incredibly valuable as I navigate this stage of my journey.

If you're available, I would love to set up a time to meet. I'm free at the following times:

[Option 1]

[Option 2]

[Option 3]

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I look forward to the possibility of connecting with you!

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

****With this template, at the meeting or shortly after, depending on how it goes, you will ask them to be an official mentor for you and outline your specific goals, timeline, and expectations.****

Additional options to add to your template:

- Tell your mentor your goal that is time specific
- How often you want to meet- consider letting them lead on that
- Let them know that they can make changes
- You can mention that the mentorship can be on a trial basis, but keep in mind relationships like these tend to disintegrate naturally if they're not a good fit

Remember: If they say no, don't take it personally; it may have to do with their schedule and their timing.

Research mentorship

Finding Research Mentors:

Finding a research mentor can be challenging. From identifying who is conducting research to deciding what type of research you want to be involved in, there are many factors to consider when searching for a mentor. Though there is not a perfect recipe to find a good research mentor, there are some steps you can take to find who might be the best fit for you based on your career aspirations.

First, you should identify something that you have an interest in. Is there a topic you want to know more about? Have you done research in the past that you want to continue? Have you had a lecturer that you enjoyed who does research? If you have an idea about which specialty you want to go into, is there research in the field you can get involved with? It may sound simple, but this may be the most challenging part of determining who might be a good research mentor.

Once you have an idea of what you might want to pursue, identify resources that consolidate what opportunities are available in the department. For research in the basic sciences, this can commonly be found on the department websites. This might also be true for clinical, quality improvement, or public health research, though it may be less common. In these cases, try to locate a contact in the department that might have information about who is involved in research. This is commonly the research coordinator, administrative assistant or department chair. Another valuable resource might be the student interest groups on your campus. Many of these organizations have established relationships with faculty who they can connect you with. In some instances, they may even have a database of research opportunities for medical students. Lastly, ask older students, mentors, or faculty if they know of opportunities in the department you are interested in. Even if they themselves are not involved with those projects, they may know of colleagues or opportunities in those fields.

After identifying some potential mentors, you will want to reach out to them to see if they need help with their research. Start by introducing yourself, your year in school, and your interest in their work. To demonstrate interest it can be beneficial to have read through some of their previous work so you can reference it in your initial communication. If you have previous research experience, detail the skills you have that would make you an asset to the prospective mentor's project. Finish by asking to discuss the opportunity for research further with a meeting.

REACHING OUT...

Subject: Research Mentorship Opportunity

Dear [Mentor's Name],

I hope you are doing well.

My name is [Name], and I am a [Year] at [Institution]. I have a strong interest in [specific area of research], and your work in [specific research topic or focus area] is extremely interesting to me. I am reaching out to explore the possibility of receiving mentorship and guidance from you as I develop my own research skills and pursue related projects.

I am particularly interested in [a specific aspect of their research that resonates with you or aligns with your goals], and I believe your expertise could provide me with invaluable insights as I seek to contribute to this field.

If you are open to discussing this further, I would love to schedule a brief meeting at your convenience. I am available at the following times:

[Option 1]

[Option 2]

[Option 3]

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to the opportunity to learn from you and contribute meaningfully to your research endeavors.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information, if needed]

At the meeting with the potential mentor, there are a few things to consider.

- Has the researcher mentored before? If so, are there older students to talk to regarding their research experience?
- Determine the mentor's mentorship style. Some research mentors are very hands-on with their research projects and will implement more direct oversight, while others will be more removed from the day-to-day research activities and might only check in periodically. Understanding which style best suits you will be important for ensuring the success of your mentor-mentee relationship.
- What are your goals for the research experience? Do you want a publication? Are you looking to present at conferences? Depending on the stage of the research, these opportunities can be more or less available to you as a medical student.

Ultimately, a successful research mentorship will be built on a mutual understanding of expectations from mentor and mentee. In many cases, ensuring that these foundations are met will be more important than the research itself.

Peer mentorship

Peer mentorship throughout medical school can be invaluable. Peers are the people that most closely understand the medical education process you are navigating. They can provide firsthand insights into the rigors of academic coursework, study strategies, and time-management skills they have found effective. Peers can also provide invaluable guidance on extracurriculars such as identifying and conducting research, becoming involved in the community, and more. Furthermore, mentors can offer a supportive ear. They possess a unique understanding of the stresses and anxieties faced by those earlier stages of their medical education journey. Their wisdom and practical advice can be an excellent resource to enhance your journey as a medical student.

In any mentorship relationship, thoughtful consideration when selecting a mentor is paramount. When seeking guidance from peers, whether it is academics, research, or any other field, find someone who has demonstrated success in that particular area and whom you admire and are eager to learn from. There are various avenues to find peer mentors. Your institution may offer formal programs that pair upperclassmen with underclassmen. Additionally, student organizations and interest groups can be places for mentorship opportunities, with some even having structured mentorship programs. If these interest groups do not have a formal mentorship program, take advantage of informal mentorship opportunities such as events and workshops where you can meet peers and naturally foster mentorship relationships. Furthermore, as you progress through your medical training and enter clinical rotations, there is the opportunity to work closely with upperclassmen who can serve as informal mentors. This can serve as a great opportunity to seek guidance from them and build a professional relationship that extends beyond the rotation. While these are just a few examples, there are numerous other ways to find mentors. Cultivating personal connections by engaging with classmates and participating in social events can also organically lead to mentorship opportunities. Regardless of how you identify your mentor, it is important to approach potential mentors respectfully and to be clear about what you hope to gain from your mentor-mentee relationship. Keep an open mind, be proactive in seeking guidance, and foster the relationships you establish.

Peers can be an excellent resource for advice and support, however, an important caveat to peer mentorship should be made. Remember that each student is different; what has worked for one student may or may not work for you. Embrace this diversity as an opportunity for growth and personalized learning.

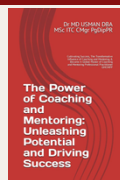
Real world example

At your AMWA chapter, it would be fruitful to start a peer mentorship program.

At University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio Long School of Medicine, they created a program called “Find your FAMWA”, through which MS1s and MS2s are paired at the beginning of the academic year. The matching process allows MS1s to not only have a mentor from the MS2 class, but to potentially find mentors in the upper classes as well, since their MS2 mentor has their own mentor in the class above and so on. This program starts with a social between MS1s and MS2s where fun questions are asked that allow students to meet each other and find potential mentors as well as create a sense of community. Afterwards, the students fill out an informational form about themselves including where they went to school, things that are important to them, some of their favorite things to do, and some of their goals about being a mentor or mentee. Mentors and mentees are paired by the school’s AMWA executive board based on the answers to their questionnaires. The mentor-mentee pairings may then meet as they decide.

When this program was evaluated using a mixed-method approach, the results indicated overall satisfaction among participants and positive perceptions of program effectiveness. While no significant differences were observed across survey responses, the program succeeded in providing valuable support, guidance, and mentorship experiences to medical students. The qualitative feedback highlights the value of peer connections and the potential for these programs to contribute to personal and professional development within the medical school community.

Resources



BOOKS:

Tribe of Mentors – Short Life Advice from the Best in the World by Tim Ferris

- The #1 New York Times best-selling author of The 4-Hour Workweek, shares the ultimate choose-your-own-adventure book—a compilation of tools, tactics, and habits from 130+ of the world's top performers.
- Practical advice from top performers
- Tools, tactics, and habits for extraordinary results
- Overcoming failure and achieving work-life balance
- Importance of relationships and connections
- Rhythmic reading experience

Mentorship in Medicine: A Book on Mentoring in the Medical Profession by Dr Bertha Chioma Ekeh

- Acknowledges traditional apprenticeship in medicine.
- Highlights historical informality in medical mentoring.
- Advocates for global implementation of formal mentoring programs in medicine.
- Emphasizes benefits, mentor types, and challenges in medical mentoring.
- Offers practical guidance for institutions initiating formal mentoring initiatives.

Mentor Coaching- Effective Mentoring for the Personal and Professional Development of Young Adults by Terrice Thomas

- How to be a good mentor
- Setting goals for mentoring
- Building relationships
- Strategies for uplifting young professionals
- Personal and professional development for young adults

The Power of Coaching and Mentoring by Dr. MD Usman DBA

- Unleashing potential and driving success: cultivating success, the transformative influence & become a global...Professional learning for Life for all.
- Unlocking potential within individuals and teams
- Building strong coaching and mentoring relationships
- Coaching and mentoring techniques for practitioners
- Impact of coaching and mentoring across diverse sectors
- Evaluating and measuring the impact of coaching and mentoring programs

PODCASTS:

The Science of Mentorship–National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine

The Medicine Mentors podcast –Mentors in Medicine

The Mentor's Voice – LeadingAge

The TLDR

1. Determine what you want from your mentor
 - a. Writing scientific paper
 - b. Grant writing
 - c. Experience in a field
 - d. Managing work life balance
2. Be organized and persistent
 - a. Show up with an agenda as the mentee
 - b. Respond to emails promptly
 - c. Reach out multiple times if you don't hear anything
3. Appreciate the difference between mentorship and sponsorship
 - a. Sponsorship is about putting your name up for advancement
4. Aim to build a network of mentors
 - a. Different people for different things
 - b. Rural health vs research
 - c. In what areas do you want mentorship
5. Listen to your gut
 - a. Are they helping you
 - b. Do they respond
 - c. Are you uncomfortable or doing all the work
6. Emergency mentoring
 - a. Used in bad patient outcomes or if you failed an exam
 - b. Easier to rely on if you have already assembled a group of mentors
7. Remember, you are not becoming a carbon copy of your mentor
 - a. You want someone who will devote time to you and you can relate to but also learn from
 - b. Have some mentors that are similar to you and some that are wildly different
 - c. It is not assumed that you will go into their field
 - d. Different mentors for different seasons of your medical journey
8. Work hard to follow through, and be honest if and when you can't
9. Recognize you can serve as a mentor to someone else



Mentoring

Cultivate & Grow



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