

## EDITORIAL

## The Power of Mentorship in Family Medicine

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Mentorship is one of the most valuable forces shaping our lives, regardless of the career path we choose. Mentorship takes many forms, from formal, structured programs to informal, unexpected moments of connection. We are reminded that mentoring reflects a gift of time, sometimes stretching across decades and across individual identities.<sup>1,2</sup> Yet in academic medicine, that gift is increasingly fragile. The decreasing tenure of senior leaders and the growing number of unfilled junior faculty positions threaten our mentoring capacity.<sup>1</sup> This is not a small concern. Research in academic medicine consistently shows that mentorship improves career choice, faculty retention, and professional development.<sup>3</sup> It also strengthens personal growth and resilience. Mentorship in medicine, especially family medicine, is more than skill-building. It shapes specialty choice, professional behavior, and career aspirations.<sup>4</sup>

I (C.M.M.) have found mentorship to be an essential part of my journey. As a teenager, a woman who believed in me first as a future doctor gave me the support and confidence to keep going. Many years later, during my residency, faculty members who recognized my potential encouraged me to see myself not only as a family physician but also as a teacher, faculty member, and leader. These individuals and their acts of belief influenced the course of my career. Today, as I start my new role as an assistant program director, I aim to do the same for others.<sup>5</sup> Being mentored has taught me humility and the importance of staying teachable. At the same time, being a mentor has allowed me to share knowledge, open doors, and create opportunities. I believe that being a good mentor and a good mentee go hand in hand. I am delighted to collaborate with one of my mentors (J.E.R.) on this editorial, who, in a previous editorial, acknowledged some of his own mentors and the wisdom he gained from them.<sup>6</sup>

In this issue of *Family Medicine*, Alexxis Gutierrez and Erica Browne, both medical students, have contributed a special article, “The Value of Cultural Representation in Medicine:

Personal Reflections of Medical Students.” One student shares how a mentor’s encouragement helped her persevere through academic challenges, confront imposter syndrome, and build confidence. Meanwhile, the other reflects on mentorship as the process of developing uplifting relationships across differences, demonstrating how cultural representation and mentorship together can foster resilience and purpose.<sup>7</sup> These medical students mentored each other through the process and were also mentored by faculty, Drs Gebauer and Thompson. This article is reminiscent of one recently published in *Family Medicine* in which mentorship gaps across the learning spectrum are identified.<sup>7</sup>

Medical students are not the only learners who desire mentors. Drs Shaughnessy and team present a fascinating article on what residents desire from their learning experience.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, many of the themes identified in this research are best conveyed in a mentor–learner relationship. Residents come to us to learn to be family physicians, but as evidenced in the article, they desire more than clinical knowledge transfer.

Rodríguez et al also offer an article on the Family Physicians Inquiries Network (FPIN), based on membership surveys over several years.<sup>9</sup> FPIN is designed to teach faculty and residents evidence-based medicine skills, and to start people on a career in writing scientific papers. The article (and FPIN itself) relies heavily on a structured mentorship model to convey these skills.

This issue has many narratives and poems, which we encourage you to enjoy. While none of these contributions address mentorship per se, by sharing their personal stories, reflections, and poems, the authors in turn become mentors to all. Each of them shares a powerful lesson. We were particularly moved by Dr Schindler’s essay entitled “A Divine Slap,” in which he shares a poignant reminder that all our patients are someone’s mother, sister, father, or brother.<sup>10</sup> The story helps us remember that none of us are perfect; we often make mistakes, but we can always learn from them. It is an excellent

example of what a good mentor does, sharing their vulnerable moments to help those who come up behind them.

As this issue of *Family Medicine* demonstrates, mentorship continues to be central to our identity as family medicine educators and plays a vital role in developing the next generation of physicians.

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