

Mentor–mentee relationship in ophthalmology – Following the footsteps of stalwarts

Bharat Gurnani, Kirandeep Kaur¹, Sahil Bhandari², Prasanth Gireesh³, Priya Sisodia⁴

Mentor- mentee relationship in any discipline is a professional and interpersonal relationship. It associates a mentor with a protégé or a mentee. Mentoring is a serious business in Ophthalmology, both academically and surgically. The mentors act as role models for future generations by acting as a friend, coach, or guide to the mentee. They do so by giving valuable advice, moral support, and inculcating skills in a mentee. It is difficult to pinpoint the precise function of the mentor-mentee relationship, but the final goal is to achieve personal and professional objectives. In the current article, the authors have shed light on the imperative aspect of one's Ophthalmology career, i.e., the mentor-mentee relationship. This article describes various aspects of mentoring, the traits of a perfect mentor and mentee, the pre-requisites for a good mentee-mentor relationship, the hindrances and obstacles in a good relationship, and the impact of COVID-19 on the same. The potential goal of this article is to ignite the constructive spirit of the mentor-mentee relationship, encourage potential mentors to become ideal mentors, and potential mentees to gain from serious mentors

Key words: Mentor, mentee, ophthalmology, relationship

"One of the greatest values of the mentor is the ability to see ahead what others can't see and help them (mentee) navigate a course to their destination." - John C Maxwell

As per the Spanish dictionary, the word mentor comes from Odyssey, written by the Greek poet Homer.^[1] The word mentor means an advisor, teacher, guide, or patron. The person who gains and receives these teachings and advice is called as the mentee. Mentoring or tutoring is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee.^[2] As the ophthalmology career flourishes, every surgeon has advisors, but only a few are fortunate enough to have real mentors. An advisor will guide the surgeon academically and surgically, but a mentor will guide the student/surgeon with a motive of professional and personal development.^[3] The mentor takes the success and failure of the mentees as his/her own. The mentors are responsible for shaping mentees' careers by their knowledge, experience, wisdom, and they help, motivate, and inspire them to become future role models. Additionally, a mentor should be able to stimulate, guide, spark, challenge, and maximize

Consultant Cornea and Refractive Services, ¹Pediatric and Squint Fellow, Aravind Eye Hospital and Post Graduate Institute of Ophthalmology, Pondicherry, ²Chief Consultant Ophthalmology, Guru Hasti Chikitsalya, Pipar City, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, ³Consultant Cataract and IOL Services, Leela Eye Clinic, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, ⁴Fellow Cornea and Refractive Services, Sri Satguru Seva Sung Trust, Janki Kund, Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh, India

Work was carried out at: Aravind eye hospital and post graduate institute of Ophthalmology, Cuddalore main road, Thavalukuppam, Pondicherry, India

Correspondence to: Dr. Bharat Gurnani, Consultant Cataract, Cornea and Refractive Services, Aravind Eye Hospital and Post Graduate Institute of Ophthalmology, Pondicherry - 605 007, India. E-mail: drgurnanibharat25@gmail.com

Received: 27-Mar-2022

Revision: 11-May-2022

Accepted: 11-Jun-2022

Published: 26-Aug-2022

Access this article online

Website:

www.ijo.in

DOI:

10.4103/ijo.IJO_795_22

Quick Response Code:



the occult talent and capacity of the mentee.^[4] This perspective focuses on the traits of a mentor and a mentee, the pre-requisites for a good mentee–mentor relationship, the hindrances in a good relationship, and the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on the same.

What is Mentorship?

The Oxford dictionary defines mentorship as “The guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person in a company or an educational institute.”^[5] However, as per the Standing Committee on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education (SCOPEME), mentorship is “a process whereby an experienced, highly regarded, and empathic person (the mentor) guides another usually younger individual (the mentee) in the development and re-examination of their ideas, learning, and personal or professional development.”^[6] In simple words, mentoring is a form of teaching. Mentoring helps a mentee learn, follow the footsteps of giants, find their purpose and destiny, support them in decision-making in challenging scenarios, and be a proponent of their academic and surgical development.^[7]

Perfect Mentor

A desirable mentor should be a role model, full of values, inspirational reference figure with rich professional and

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

For reprints contact: WKHLRPMedknow_reprints@wolterskluwer.com

Cite this article as: Gurnani B, Kaur K, Bhandari S, Gireesh P, Sisodia P. Mentor–mentee relationship in ophthalmology – Following the footsteps of stalwarts. Indian J Ophthalmol 2022;70:3416-8.

personal experience for the mentee.^[8] An ideal mentor should be able to pass on the baton to the coming generations. Mentoring is an art learned with an unrivaled attitude, intelligence, rich experience, emotional quotient, cultural values, empathy, and constant hard work over the years.^[9] All mentors have something to teach and are perfect in their own ways. A good mentor should stimulate the developing minds, does not provide them with easy solutions, and give mentees valuable advice under challenging scenarios. In ophthalmology, or take medical profession, a true mentor should have some characteristic to be an ideal mentor [Table 1].^[10] In this era of globalization and digitalization, with a large number of online academic resources available, a mentee should not underestimate their mentor. In Greek mythology, when Ulysses was preparing to go for a fight in Trojan War, he realized that his son Telemachus would be left alone. He wanted his son to be trained like a king, so he trusted his friend as a mentor for Telemachus while he was fighting in the Trojan war. Since then, a mentor has been given the status of a God, a true teacher, who refines a mentee's qualities, develops skill, inculcates discipline, and shares his/her professional value with the mentee.^[11] Table 1 also highlights the qualities a mentor should refrain from.

Perfect Mentee

An ideal mentee will trust, observe, listen, ask questions, and follow the footsteps of his/her mentor. A mentee should be honest, hardworking, enthusiastic, have the zeal to succeed, vigilant, intelligent, and should be able to understand the

Table 1: Characteristics an ideal mentor and mentee should have, and characteristics which mentor and mentee should refrain from having

Characteristics of an ideal mentor and mentee	
Mentor	Mentee
Good communication skill	Self-disciplined
Creative thinker	Diligent
Inspiring	Courteous
Empathetic	Responsible
Positive attitude	Looking for opportunities
Punctual	Team player
Discipline	Consistent
Knowledgeable	Persistent
Selfless	Truthful
Friendly and approachable	Hardworking
Open-minded	Multitasker
Characteristics which a mentor and a mentee should refrain from having	
Mentor	Mentee
Lack of professionalism	Lack of respect
Lack of commitment	Lazy attitude
Limited knowledge	Inflexible
Poor judgment	Procrastination
Lack of organizational skills	Less focused
Self-centeredness	Lack of knowledge
Poor motivator	Arrogance
Differential attitude	Aggression
Egoistic	Overconfidence
Negative criticism	Rebellious

mentor.^[8] This can be a decisive factor between an average and a rewarding career. The most critical step in a mentee's career is to surround him/herself with intelligent, experienced people, show interest in them, and should be yearning to learn and glow.^[12] The mentee should accept criticism, must be receptive to constructive feedback, respect the mentor, follow the deadline and timeline, and should be able to manage and balance the mentee-mentor relationship.^[13] The mentee should refrain from complaining attitude, comparisons, and dissection of minor issues. Instead, a mentee should look for solutions to solve the problems. The mentee should also develop the quality to accept failure and self-criticism.^[14] Table 1 list the qualities of an ideal mentee and the qualities the mentees should refrain from.

What is a Successful Mentor and Mentee Relationship?

To have a successful mentor and mentee relationship, both should be synergistic and symbiotic. The mentor and mentee both should benefit and learn from each other's company, and it should be a rewarding situation for both.^[15] As correctly said in the phrases of a mentor, "I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and the most from my students." The best teachers can be students, and in this scenario, the mentee can be the best teacher. The Greek ancestors emulated their relationships based on human evolution and survival. Young people followed older experts or their fathers as role models, and the results were seen in various sectors like art, trade, and business. The first successful example of a mentee-mentor relationship in medicine was the friendship of William Osler and William Harvey Cushing, where Osler acted as a mentor. In ophthalmology, it can be seen in the form of transmission of clinical and surgical skills to mentees or academic growth in the form of numerous publications.^[16] Sound clinical decision-making in tough scenarios is also an example of a successful relationship. One of the previous articles mentioned^[17] that mentoring has an enormous impact on professional upliftment, career choices, direction, and research productivity. All India Ophthalmic Society Academic and Research Committee (AIOS-ARC) webinars and Youth Ophthalmic Society of India (YOSI) initiatives are prime examples of successful mentee-mentor relationship. However, in some scenarios, the benefits of mentoring may not be apparent since the growth of a mentee depends on various factors. Hence, mentee-mentor relationship should not be overestimated consistently.

Hindrances in Successful Mentee-Mentor Relationship

First and foremost, a slight age difference between the mentor and mentee with limited years of experience can be a barrier to a successful mentee-mentor relationship. Next is the physical presence of the mentor, which can facilitate bedside clinical training and surgical training. Virtual training and mentoring at a different geographic location can again be a barrier to the mentee's growth and perfect bonding. Overcriticism, unrealistic expectations, unsafe working environment, overwork, emotional hurt, lack of appreciation, pinpointing faults, abuse, and lack of clinical and surgical opportunities are other barriers to a successful relationship.^[18]

Impact of COVID-19 on Mentee–Mentor Relationship

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the mentee–mentor relationship. Considering ophthalmology, due to lockdown measures and reduction in patient volume, the clinical and surgical exposure for mentees dropped drastically.^[19] On the other hand, it opened numerous opportunities for mentees for research, publication, innovations, and academic growth. For mentors, it opened opportunities for academic mentoring and collaborations.

Acknowledgements

Aravind Eye Hospital and Post Graduate Institute of Ophthalmology, Pondicherry, is acknowledged.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest

References

- Gisbert JP. Mentor-mentee relationship in medicine. *Gastroenterol Hepatol* 2017;40:48-57.
- Gandhi M, Johnson M. Creating More Effective Mentors: Mentoring the Mentor. *AIDS Behav* 2016;20(Suppl 2):294-303.
- Honavar SG. Mentoring is a serious business. *Indian J Ophthalmol* 2019;67:1915-7.
- Kukreja S, Arora R, Mahajan R. Mentorship program: Modern outlook of traditional knowledge. *Int J Appl Basic Med Res* 2020;10:65-7.
- McLaughlin C. Mentoring: What is it? How do we do it and how do we get more of it? *Health Serv Res* 2010;45:871-84.
- Standing Committee on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education. An enquiry into mentoring. A SCOPME Report. London: Department of Health; 1998.
- Brooks J. Let's get serious about mentoring. *Br Dent J* 2018;224:72. doi: 10.1038/sj.bdj. 2018.39.
- Eller LS, Lev EL, Feurer A. Key components of an effective mentoring relationship: A qualitative study. *Nurse Educ Today* 2014;34:815-20.
- Straus SE, Johnson MO, Marquez C. Characteristics of successful and failed mentoring relationships: A qualitative study across two academic health centers. *Acad Med* 2013;88:82-9. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0b013e31827647a0.
- Burgess A, van Diggele C, Mellis C. Mentorship in the health professions: A review. *Clin Teach* 2018;15:197-202. doi: 10.1111/tct. 12756.
- Sambunjak D, Straus SE, Marusic A. A systematic review of qualitative research on the meaning and characteristics of mentoring in academic medicine. *J Gen Intern Med* 2010;25:72-8.
- Deora H, Yagnick NS, Tripathi M. Mentor-mentee relationship in neurosurgery: Standing on the shoulder of giants. *World Neurosurg* 2020;141:110-2.
- Manthiram K, Edwards KM. Reflections on the mentor-mentee relationship. *J Pediatric Infect Dis Soc* 2021;piab025. doi: 10.1093/jpids/piab025.
- Anderson L, Silet K, Fleming M. Evaluating and giving feedback to mentors: New evidence-based approaches. *Clin Transl Sci* 2012;5:71-7. doi: 10.1111/j. 1752-8062.2011.00361.x.
- Detsky AS, Baerlocher MO. Academic mentoring--how to give it and how to get it. *JAMA* 2007;297:2134-6.
- Barondess JA. Cushing and Osler: The evolution of a friendship. *Trans Stud Coll Physicians Phila* 1985;7:79-111.
- Sambunjak D, Straus SE, Marusić A. Mentoring in academic medicine: A systematic review. *JAMA* 2006;296:1103-15.
- Rabatín JS, Lipkin M, Rubin AS. A year of mentoring in academic medicine: Case report and qualitative analysis of fifteen hours of meetings between a junior and senior faculty member. *J Gen Intern Med* 2004;19:569-73.
- Gurnani B, Kaur K. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clinical ophthalmology. *Indian J Med Res* 2021;153:199-200.