


Hope and Mentorship in the Time of COVID-19

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Regardless of their current subspecialty or stage of practice, many radiologists still fondly recall their off-service PGY1 year. There was the thrill of finally being able to sign prescriptions, and the new pressure of making decisions alone overnight. There were moments of dismay when clinicians (half-jokingly) requested interpretations of high-resolution CTs or shoulder MRIs. But most of all, there was the anticipation of being mere months away from formal radiology training. For many, however, that excitement was tempered by several concerns. In particular, the prospect of research often weighs heavily on the minds of junior trainees. The scope of potential projects is nearly unlimited, and while this can be invigorating, it also presents a multitude of logistic questions. How does one find a willing mentor with suitable research interests and expertise? How does one collect and analyze radiology-specific data? And, given the plethora of publications already available, can one's findings truly be novel or useful?

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further complicated such concerns for new trainees such as myself. Social distancing policies and the provision of only essential patient services hindered extracurricular pursuits such as mentorship and research.¹ Key learning opportunities like interprofessional rounds, clinical case conferences, and academic lectures were abruptly halted. Even when sessions resumed in an online format, IT issues and Zoom fatigue beleaguered successful implementation. Although we understood the necessity and context of these public health measures, the situation was nonetheless stressful. My conversations with other junior residents revealed a common theme of feeling disconnected from our seniors, attendings, and other teachers. Further, we still needed to achieve training milestones on a strict timeline despite the disruptions of COVID-19. Undertaking research projects, presenting at conferences, and choosing fellowships were commitments we all felt ill-equipped to pursue.

The inaugural Resident Reviewers Mentorship Program started by the Canadian Association of Radiologists Journal (CARJ) in 2020 was an opportunity to address these unprecedented issues. Based on shared research interests, the CARJ matched mentees with staff radiologists who were experienced in manuscript review and resident education. This process alleviated the hesitance or intimidation that junior trainees often feel when approaching a busy attending for mentorship.² Recognizing that my mentor volunteered for this program enabled me to feel comfortable discussing my learning

goals and limitations in knowledge. It was reassuring to know that my mentor and I had similar expectations and commitment to the program. Moreover, their professional skillset inspired confidence and motivated me to actively participate. The CARJ also provided clear objectives, directions and timelines for our endeavors. I appreciated this formal structure, which has been shown to facilitate communication, timely evaluation, and tangible outcomes.²

The benefits of joining this program are multifold, especially for junior learners like myself. I learned the necessary components of a robust article and participated in the rigorous review process required for successful publication. I was challenged to think of perspectives other than the authors' when reviewing results, and to question whether other conclusions could be drawn. I gained understanding of study designs, ethics approval considerations, and grant applications. Beyond these academic aspects, working closely with my mentor also facilitated my personal growth and wellness. They helped me feel connected to my radiology program and the specialty as a whole. This was invaluable particularly given the isolation, burnout, and anxiety triggered by COVID-19.¹ Although academic mentorship is typically initiated for education and professional advising, it is a dynamic longitudinal process that often expands beyond these basic purposes.³ The relationship evolves as different questions, responsibilities, needs, and opportunities arise. I experienced this firsthand as my first year in the program drew to a close. My mentor wished to impart some of their insight and experience as I neared the end of a tumultuous off-service year. We had organic conversations about work-life balance and interests outside of the hospital. We also discussed important considerations for potential fellowships and job hunting. I was encouraged to read about future directions and unanswered questions in subspecialties of interest. This further prompted me to contemplate the type of research I could integrate into my eventual practice, accounting for factors like regional patient demographics and acuity of care. My

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mentor encouraged these reflections while also educating me on employment trends and different radiology group structures.

Mentorship increases confidence, research productivity, and job satisfaction—particularly for individuals who are early in their career.⁴ Additional benefits include improved work efficiency and higher recruitment and retention for leadership opportunities. For many radiology trainees, the timely implementation of the CARJ Resident Reviewers Mentorship Program mitigated multiple concerns induced by the initial uncertainty of COVID-19. Personally, the benefits of this mentorship manifested not only through academic skill building, but also career planning and personal resilience—some of the many positive by-products previously described in literature.^{1,2} The knowledge and direction I gained throughout this program embolden me to establish more mentorship relationships, both as a mentee and as a mentor. I am so grateful for the vision and effort put into the CARJ Resident Reviewers Mentorship Program, especially given the impositions of a global pandemic. I look forward to the program's continued evolution and the impact it will have on future generations of radiology trainees.

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