Tips for Mentors

• Mentors who share their expertise and experience are essential to the successful career development of junior faculty. They should be prepared to provide both professional and personal support to faculty, to create a developmental environment that supports this growth, and to be flexible in terms of supporting a mentee’s evolving career trajectory.

• Take advantage of opportunities to learn about your mentee both personally and professionally, e.g., accomplishments, interests/hobbies, values, career trajectory.

• Ideally, the mentoring relationship should be mutually beneficial, with mentees and mentors learning from each other.

• When a potential mentee contacts you, suggest that he/she schedule an initial meeting with you to discuss his/her career objectives, short-term and long-term goals, and what role you might play in supporting them. Exchange CVs with the mentee in advance to facilitate the discussion. Faculty may choose mentors to assist them in the following areas: career goals, career advancement, short-term and long-term goals, time line for achieving goals, educational portfolios, clinical activities, quality improvement initiatives, research activities (grant writing, implementation of research, scientific writing), authorship advice, work/life integration, time management, creation of a CV or personal statement, increasing professional visibility, organizational culture and structure, etc.

• Begin any mentoring relationship by discussing mutual goals and expectations as well as expected frequency of meetings, and work with your mentor(s) to establish a “no-fault” means to amicably end the relationship in the event that either party feels that the intended goals are not being achieved. Consider a formal or informal contract.

• Establish realistic time commitments with regard to the mentoring relationship.

• Ensure that the mentoring relationship is a professional one based on trust, mutual respect, transparency, and confidentiality.

• Provide honest and nonjudgmental feedback, discuss expectations, and focus on interacting in a positive and caring way.

• Focus during meetings on your mentee’s strengths and goals in helping them to develop a career focus or niche; encourage them to create an “elevator speech” to articulate their personal career goals.

• At the end of each meeting, discuss action items and suggest potential agenda items for future meetings.

• Follow through on agreed upon actions and follow-up on difficult conversations.

• One of the most powerful tools a mentor has is the ability to ask the difficult or important questions; giving constructive criticism and advice is also key, but try to provide specific strategies or examples when possible.

• Teach your mentee how and when to say both “no” and “yes” to opportunities.

• Be an advocate for your mentee, supporting them both in times of difficulty or stress as well as when they have accomplishments. Mentors can play an important role in confronting those who are placing roadblocks in the way of the mentee’s success as well as supporting and advocating for women and minority faculty who may have experienced a variety of challenges in their career paths. Nominate your mentee for professional opportunities, awards, and important committees.
• Follow through on commitments you make with your mentee; provide timely feedback.

• Periodically take a step back and evaluate how effective the mentoring relationship is, and consider a discussion with your mentee about changing his/her mentorship team if it is not working well.

• Avoid making negative comments about your mentee to others, and keep confidential discussions confidential.

• Try to be available to your mentee, to be an active listener, and to inquire about work/life integration. Maintain regular/frequent contact with the mentee during the first 2–3 months, make at least one contact per month each month thereafter to demonstrate your interest, and consider a minimum one-year time commitment through an informal or formal agreement.

• If you are not the Division Director, discuss annual performance reviews with the junior faculty member: how to prepare, what to expect, and how to deal with different outcomes. Consider offering to preview the document before it is submitted to the Division Director and debrief afterwards.

• Take advantage of opportunities to improve skills beneficial to outstanding mentorship.

• Familiarize yourself with the RPT guidelines (especially as they relate to the mentee’s track).

• Support the mentee in navigating the organization’s, university’s, and department’s culture and politics. Build and maintain relationships with peer mentors, such as other mid-level or senior faculty, both inside and outside your Division or Department. Familiarize yourself with resources available to support your own mentorship and career development.