



## Importance of mentoring

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After many residents write the College's Certification Examination in Family Medicine in May, they will move their attention to finalizing scholarly projects and collecting all the other pieces of evidence to show that they have met the requirements for completion of their residency programs and can begin independent practice. Beginning independent practice is an important period of transition for residents. There is excitement as one begins his or her career but also considerable anxiety. Residents completing their programs often have substantial financial debt that will soon need to be paid back; some might have issues with young families or have elderly parents to attend to; and some might have entered into contractual obligations with the establishment of a new practice or locum arrangements. They are often dealing with a move to a new community and many other life stressors. In addition, they are aware of the concerns expressed by some, including themselves, about their ability to be practising physicians, about whether they have all the knowledge and skills necessary to do the job. It all becomes a little overwhelming.

At a recent Ontario College of Family Physicians board meeting, which I attended as a guest, readiness for practice was a topic of discussion. Are our residency programs preparing residents for practice? How do residents go from a position where, although they have developed increasing independence within their programs, they are in an environment that is still generally supervised to the world of independent practice?

There are many possible answers to this question; one answer that I propose is mentoring. Although family medicine residents at the end of training are capable of beginning independent practice, mentors are critical to the development of their confidence and experience—

a sentiment that was shared among the seasoned family doctors at this Ontario College of Family Physicians meeting who described some of their own experiences with mentors early on in their careers. Residents acquire a substantial body of knowledge during their residency programs, but because of their limited experiences, they have had little time to apply their knowledge and skills in different environments, with different levels of resources available. This comes with the practice of family medicine.

There is much published literature regarding the importance of mentoring in faculty development and the engagement of family doctors in scholarly activity. In addition, mentoring for medical students and residents has always been strongly encouraged. It makes sense that the presence of mentors at probably one of the most important transition points in a physician's career would be highly desirable. Newly practising family doctors are increasingly interested in group practice rather than solo practice. Although the reasons for this are numerous, I would argue that the presence of colleagues to help mentor them in their clinical settings would be one very good reason. The case room, the hospital, and the emergency department are settings where mentors might be needed the most. Perhaps as residents enter practice we need to be more explicit that there will be individuals who are willing to mentor them, to help them to continue to develop their clinical courage to maintain practice in these environments.

I certainly remember the mentors I have had throughout my family medicine career thus far. I still rely on them at times. I think many of us do. I can only hope that we can pass this along and provide mentorship to family doctors early in their careers and into the future. 

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Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 358.