



Association of women surgeons career development resource

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The Association of Women Surgeons (AWS) and the *American Journal of Surgery* are proud to introduce a series of articles describing the many interest areas and varieties of practice that comprise surgery. Although this series is aimed primarily toward trainees who are in the process of choosing specific surgical careers, and at students who want to know what a surgical career might be like, it also will be of interest to any surgeon who considers a change in direction or who mentors others.

The primary purpose of creating the Career Development Resource (CDR) was wide dispersion of fundamental information relevant to an individual's career objectives as a surgeon. The CDR was the brainchild of Dr. Vivian Gahtan, Past President of the AWS. AWS members were recruited to write articles specific to their area(s) of expertise including surgical specialty, practice type (eg, academic, government, hospital-based, health maintenance organization, or private practice), aspects of career development (eg, job negotiation, promotion, mentorship, research), and relevant organizations (eg, Association for Academic Surgery, Society for University Surgeons). Other members edited the articles.

It is difficult for most young professionals to obtain sufficient information to make informed career choices. These choices involve not only the subject matter of various surgical specialties and subspecialties, but also different types of surgical practice. For example, academicians know about academic careers, but not everyone wants that kind of life. Many wish to devote their lives mostly to caring for patients, in private practice, working for a health maintenance organization, or participating in the Public Health Service or the military. Trainees want to know not only what particular career types and subspecialties consist of, but also what the qualifications are and how best to prepare themselves for their choices. Other issues to be addressed beyond discipline and practice type include job negotiation, academic promotion, and

administrative advancement. It is our hope that individuals will gain guidance when they lack a mentor to provide direction.

Advising young professionals is the responsibility of those who are senior, more experienced in the field, those who have the advantage of experience in what questions to ask and how goals are best attained. They have a more mature perspective and a more sophisticated understanding of the field than a novice has. In other words, they can be mentors.

Mentor was the old and trusted friend that Ulysses left in charge of his household when he set out for the Trojan War. Mentor's form was taken by Athena, goddess of wisdom and skill, to guide Ulysses' young son Telemachus. From this combination of trust, wisdom, and skill comes our concept of a mentor—a trusted counselor or guide.

In academia as in business, mentorship traditionally has functioned as a mechanism for promoting favored individuals at the expense of others. Although producing a certain continuity and stability, it also has resulted in predominantly white male systems and homogenous groups because people generally feel most comfortable helping and associating with those who are most similar to themselves. Although accomplished in an atmosphere of assistance, the overall result was discrimination against people unlike those who already were established in their fields. Nonetheless, there are many men who do not have a formalized mentor or advocate.

Mentorship also can function as a key strategy for helping underrepresented groups. Providing informed counsel on career strategies could facilitate advancement for anyone. Public dissemination of information levels the playing field. The end goal is a culture in which success depends not on demographics but on merit and motivation.

Although the CDR does not replace the real-life mentors that each person needs over the course of their career, it should provide some valuable career development information. In this first introduction to the CDR, 2 articles are featured—the clinician scientist (by Dr. Colleen Brophy) and the clinical researcher (by Dr. Leigh Neumayer)—which should provide helpful information to those considering pursuing each of these areas. Welcome to the CDR.

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