

Mentorship in Plastic Surgery: A Systematic Review of the Current Literature and Elucidation of Recurring Themes

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A key component of success and advancement in plastic surgery is mentorship, and in this issue, the authors identify defining characteristics of quality plastic surgery mentors via a systematic review of the literature. Eight articles were included, which identified shared identity, role model behavior, and availability as important—qualities that have also been mirrored in cross-specialty research. Cho et al¹ assessed recommendation letters for 29 faculty members nominated for a Lifetime Achievement in Mentorship Award. These mentors were highlighted as role models, able to aid mentees in developing and achieving a vision, available to meet frequently, supporting of personal and professional balance, and setting the standards for legacy mentorship.¹

Many factors contribute to surgeon success, including self-motivation, the training environment, and advancement opportunities, but a surgeon's mentorships often define the individual.² A mentor network can impact skill and knowledge acquisition, training and posttraining positions, research productivity, and notoriety.³ Mentorship, or a lack thereof, can even limit access to the specialty for aspiring students. For example, without STEP 1 scoring, sponsorship in plastic surgery has gained importance when applying for training positions.⁴ During training, operative experiences and research can provide time for these mentorships to develop while equipping surgeons with tools needed for their next career phase. Eventually, surgeons transition from mentee to mentor roles, which enhance career satisfaction, thereby demonstrating the multigenerational compounding effects of a surgeon's leadership.²

The importance of shared identities between the mentor and mentee was reported in this issue, and included qualities such as sex, race, and ethnicity, which may contribute toward unique experiences of surgeons in these minority groups. For example, Hinton et al⁵ explained that because minority groups are more likely to experience feelings such as imposter syndrome, a mentor's

encouragement, instilling confidence in the mentee, is crucial. In addition, minorities may experience unique cultural differences, which when paired with unwritten rules and behavioral expectations, may disadvantage them in their careers.⁵ More frequently, female surgeons report carrying the majority of household responsibilities. They also are uniquely disadvantaged in areas such as pay.⁶ Having a female mentor who successfully overcame these challenges can empower a young female trainee, making the difference in her future career aspirations and achievements. A mentor's role in teaching the silent curriculum and empowering the mentee may mean the difference in a minority mentee overcoming their unique obstacles and achieving their career goals.

Overall, the impact of mentorship can only be appreciated by those with strong mentor-mentee relationships. It is crucial that plastic surgeons, trainees, and students identify a mentor who is both accessible and willing to invest time into them, as this article reports. After all, time is crucial to building mutual trust and respect. It can be difficult to find a mentor with the aforementioned qualities, particularly for individuals like solo practitioners, medical students without a home program, and minorities. Mentorship structures have been established within plastic surgery programs and societies to help with this, whereas telementorship can be used to widen the scope of access globally.⁷

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