

### Mentorship

Haider Ali Naqvi, Afshan Channa

Department of Psychiatry, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan.

An insight in to the myriad opportunities of life beacons a person when he enters academia. It's a place which gives birth to the intellectuals of the society. When this process is thwarted, societies' decompensate into groups and factions — losing its collective identity and sense of destiny — a psychosis, albeit of subtle nature, permeates its individuals. When academia is allowed to fulfill its function one sees a natural blooming of intellect.

Discipline of Medicine mandates transfer of knowledge from a teacher to a disciple within the framework of a university-hospital. Seasoned professor carries out his rounds, with a group of students, imparting knowledge acquired through life time of 'effortful learning'. A student is expected to inculcate an attitude of a receptive audience, eager to absorb the experience without doubt and questioning, thereby learning the science, art and ethics of medicine. However, critical to this transfer of knowledge is a reasonable degree of skepticism. The ability to challenge the existing paradigms of medicine has been the hallmark of progress in science. Science being a discipline of logic and reasoning relies on "questioning" the body of evidence. Science is not to be appreciated but to be analyzed critically for its authenticity.<sup>1</sup> In situations when such questioning is encouraged, science is encouraged. Otherwise, heresies and dogmas prevail. The critical element in this process is mentorship.

Mentorship is an asymmetric relation which facilitates flow of knowledge, skills and attitude in uncertain situations. It is based on mutual trust, respect and understanding. Dictionary defines mentorship in antiquity as 'a friend of Odysseus entrusted to teach son of Odysseus'. Modern day usage implies a trusted 'counselor', 'guide' or 'guru'.<sup>2</sup> There are no agreed definitions of mentorship. One definition describes it as 'a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development'.<sup>3</sup> Mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee. There is no fixed technique, which could epitomize the mentors-mentee relationship. However, Bob Aubrey and Paul Cohen delineated five major techniques calling them as "wisdom tactics."<sup>4</sup> It involves 'accompanying' the person on the pathway of learning. At times, change is difficult and mentor has to do

'sowing' of idea or a world view before mentee is ready for a change. In 'catalyzing', the mentor pushes the apprentice in to new dimension of thought and behaviour, after critical learning has taken place. In certain situations mentor has to lead by 'showing' how to accomplish certain things, akin to making a talk. Once the mentee is ready, the supervisor begins 'harvesting' the ripe fruit by asking critical questions, leading the trainee towards certain conclusions. There are other enterprising techniques of mentorship, which is beyond the scope of this write-up. In the following paragraphs we will focus on the issue from the perspective of a system as well as an apprentice.

Established universities have structured mentorship programmes where faculty volunteer to provide face-to-face support to the trainees.<sup>5</sup> Faculty is encouraged to meet students on a regular basis both formally and informally. Idea is to encourage students to share their problems. This could be general issues to specific academic dilemmas. A trainee could be struggling with the adjustment to the nuances of an alien culture after relocation or dealing with the difficulty of finding an apartment at an affordable cost. The educational supervision and guidance in terms of career choices is a denominator common to mentor and mentee. Senior students could also be a valuable resource in terms of mentorship. They could provide some ready advice in terms of activities of daily living, besides advice on how to gear up intellectual resources for an uphill academic task. Mentorship can be used as a powerful tool by encouraging an individual to stay motivated and focused on their motive, providing a positive way to spend leisure time, take chances to face challenges, by offering opportunities to consider a new career path of their own interest and get much needed economic skills and knowledge, by improving perception and attitude toward parents, peers and teachers.

The prevalent disdain speaks volumes regarding the mentorship programme in most institutions. The first thing one must learn as he stands at the threshold of an academia is the wisdom to appreciate dissonant world views. This not only gives a sense of security but also a diversion to look through personal insecurities. The journey of triumph from selfish worldview to a balanced outlook is what one must be inclined to undertake when he/she enters academia. This is also how Nature preaches the truth; a tree wouldn't grow shadow for a wearying soul unless it has gone through fagging itself from myriad of dingy roots to a beautiful green crown for uncovered

heads. The ailment that has killed our institutions is the approach to take short cuts on the process of growth and development. All along the struggle it's the tree — an institution — which should be an incubator to groom trainees' strength at all grounds. Since God vaticinates to live with divergence in this world, it's meaningless to expect another person to hold your right hand with his right and walk together on the path of destiny. Mentoring is not about producing a replica of the original. Mentorship is an unconditional effort to seek out individuality out of an individual. Therefore mentors should have a vision to see an oak tree in an acorn.<sup>6</sup>

The way forward could be to have mentorship programmes which are robust. It should have mix of faculty members who have a genuine interest in guiding the next-generation. There should be protected time for this activity, covered in terms of remuneration. Though institutional heads, like Deans, Chairs and Section heads, course Directors/coordinators have this mandate, the day to day administrative issue tends to occupy their time and attention. Regular meetings, in informal settings could very well provide

the relationship framework between mentor and mentee. At the level of institution mentorship should be seen as valuable activity, duly appreciated with appreciation and (best teachers) awards. Students counseling services should also be utilized in the mentorship programme. However, counseling services need to be preventive, addressing the needs of the mentees at various stages of the educational career. All in all, programme should ensure that students — undergraduate and postgraduate alike- don't fall through the cracks.

## References

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