

The Most Important Lesson I've Learned This Year

Mentee to Mentor

Nathan Wong, MD
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

Similar to other trainees, my path in residency has been filled with unbelievable accomplishments and expected speed bumps along the way. My final year has revolved around refining clinical skills and focusing on the pursuit of surgical excellence, while relentlessly studying for board examinations and providing optimal patient care. As I transition from resident to urologist, I am grateful for the incredible mentorship experiences I have had.

The past five years have passed by in a blink of an eye. I remember the start of residency as if it was yesterday. The transition from medical student to physician was an exciting time – I was eager to demonstrate independence and my passion for urology. In the first year of residency, I faced challenges in juggling clinical responsibilities, call, and the need to improve surgical skills. Balancing work, research ambitions and personal life became an overwhelming struggle. Over the past year, I have learned to appreciate the importance of having supportive mentors and providing mentorship to others.

It can be difficult to navigate in any field without direction. My first mentor was a recent graduate from my very own training program. In the midst of my training, I was slowly becoming consumed by clinical duties; my daily routine would be to eat, sleep, work and repeat. This particular mentor was very observant and noticed that I was appearing progressively more fatigued. He saw a part of him in me. One day, he sat me down to openly share his experience when he was a resident. As a resident, he found it difficult to spend time with his family, and this conflict affected his work. He learned to set aside dedicated time for his family and noticed how this change had also improved his work life. He taught me the importance of carving out time for things that are important to me, and the positive impact that this could have on my long-term career. I refocused on self-care, exercising and eating well; I soon found that my energy was enhanced and my passion for urology revitalized. Through my mentor, I also learned how important it is to be open about both successes and struggles with teammates, in order to create deeper connections based on trust, honesty and humility.

Because of how important mentorship has been in my career, I strive to provide helpful mentorship to others over the past year. One particular mentee was a junior resident who was making small, but repetitive blunders, which led to anxiety at work and further mistakes. Like how mentors have helped me in the past, I openly shared my challenges as a junior resident with him; I wanted him to understand that everyone makes mistakes and that he should not let them shake his confidence. Furthermore, I shared what I learned from my mistakes. Mistakes are inevitable, but they are only failures if you don't learn from them. Mentoring others has helped me reflect on important lessons I've learned along my journey.

In the words of Sir Isaac Newton, "If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants." In the past five years, my mentors have been my greatest champions and critics – they have helped me to see where I can improve and they have encouraged me to aspire greatly. I am thankful for the mentorship I have received and given throughout my training. As this field continues to grow, I look forward to continuing to succeed, struggle, fail, learn and share my experiences with those around me.