



View From the Pyramids: Where Have All the Mentors Gone?

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EDITORIAL

In this issue of *The AAO Journal* we have a great selection of articles, including “Impact of Predoctoral Teaching Fellows on Osteopathic Medical Students: A Near-Peer Teaching Program Evaluation” by Beatrice Akers, DO; Glenn Davis, MS; Jordan Keys, DO, MS; Stacey L. Pierce-Talsma, DO, MS MEDL, FNAOME; and Gregg Lund, DO, MS, FAAP. This article discusses the use of predoctoral teaching fellows in a peer-to-peer mentorship program. This article has me thinking about my mentors and how we as a profession plan to keep up with this challenge. Current statistics from the American Osteopathic Association include 37 colleges of osteopathic medicine in 58 locations with 1 in 4 medical students nationwide attending an osteopathic program.¹ While these numbers are astounding and a huge win for our profession, the task of finding mentorship for these students can be daunting.

With the total number of practicing osteopathic physicians being 114,425 and the newly graduated in 2018 being 6,500 of that number, it is easy to see that the balance of the profession is rapidly tipping towards the side of the young, mostly under the age of 40.² While the medical profession has always used near-peer teaching, including senior residents teaching medical students, there is no replacement for the experienced mentor, who can provide the depth of knowledge and savoir-faire that is needed to relay the wonders of this great profession.

When I look to my own peer cohort for who is actively mentoring, there is a sad paucity of individuals who are stepping up. Reasons vary from being too busy with practice and physician burnout to no energy left for teaching and feeling unqualified to mentor.

A recent article pertaining to radiology addressed the importance of mentorship in that profession, but it can be equally applied to osteopathic medicine:

Mentorship plays a critical role in the success of academic radiologists. Faculty members with mentors have better career opportunities, publish more papers, receive more research grants, and have greater overall career satisfaction. However, with the increasing focus on clinical productivity, pressure on turn-around times, and the difficult funding climate, effective mentoring in academic radiology can

be challenging. The high prevalence of “burnout” among radiologists makes mentorship even more important.³

We can infer that, though we have no studies on the benefit of senior mentors in the osteopathic profession, mentorship matters for all the same reasons and more. If we wish to maintain the distinctiveness of this profession, we need more seasoned mentors to step up. The question is how do we develop these mentors in a time where adding “one more thing” may be the tipping point for full-blown physician burnout.

“Mentorship reminds us of the reasons we chose this great profession and helps to refocus our passion.”

I would argue that mentorship actually renews physician purpose through helping to create the next generation of physicians, regardless of specialty. Mentorship reminds us of the reasons we chose this great profession and helps to refocus our passion.

In addition, we need to nurture a culture of giving back and developing mentorship as a norm rather than an exception in our profession. We need the seasoned physicians’ knowledge and understanding if we wish to keep our profession from becoming a statistic.

In his book *Mentoring 101*, John C. Maxwell addresses that many do not mentor due to feeling insecure in their own skill set, and that we need to adopt a “mentorship mindset.” Maxwell writes, “Mentorship is as much who you are as what you do.”⁴ My question to you is what legacy do you wish to leave behind?

The AAO provides a mentorship program through Convocation, and I encourage all to participate as we all have something special

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to offer. Do not let the feeling of being “unqualified” or “out of touch” stop you from offering the depth of knowledge you have to bring. Let’s make mentorship the norm so we develop the best profession we can for generations to come.

In Gratitude,

Janice Blumer, DO, FAAO

References

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