

Medicus April

The Mark of Mentors

You don't have to spend too much time in medical school before you realise that the majority of learning is not restricted to lectures and books. Whether it is discussion and debate in Problem Based Learning groups, emotional clinical debriefings with a tutor or the musings of a doctor during various placements – those who come to be seen as mentors in our lives leave a mark not unlike your first grade teacher.

This little point places the onus on the 'prodigy' to refine skills in not only in absorbing the explicit lessons at hand, but also to decipher the implicit meaning in the words and actions of a 'mentor'.

A good mentor brings to the table a grand amount of knowledge and experience. He or She will not only direct scientific learning but also sustain a human element during scholarly pursuits. It is arguable that there is no such thing as a 'bad' mentor - the very fact that an individual steps up to the task of teaching demonstrates something above and beyond the expected norm. Those who find mentoring to be a chore have either made a mistake in what they expected or have not yet polished their technique.

It is common to hold a degree of reverence for mentors; when blindly stumbling through the cavernous maze of medical marvels a senior colleague may throw light and guide the way. The revered mentor may however also demonstrate their humanity (and hence whittle away your reverence for them) when they don't, won't or can't guide you. Again, this does not make them bad – it just reiterates that no one individual has all the answers.