

Editorial

Surgeons as Mentors

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The Oxford dictionary defines a mentor as an experienced person in a company or educational institution who trains and counsels new employees or students. For medical students, their initial exposure to surgery were during their clinical years. Although most surgeons were not formally appointed as mentors, they were nevertheless role models for many undergraduates considering a future surgical career. What are the hallmarks of an excellent surgical teacher? A master teacher is passionate and enthusiastic with the ability to make the subject interesting and easily understood by simplifying complex issues.

How do we further stimulate the interest of medical students? We can do this by allowing them to assist in surgery. This hands-on approach has a positive influence and may encourage a future career in surgery. Our legacy for the future generation of surgeons is by mentoring trainees and junior surgeons. Mentees work with their mentors and learn surgery not only through formal knowledge but also from tacit knowledge by observing, imitating, and practising (1). As mentors, we expect our mentees to progress both personally and professionally. We should rejoice when they have surpassed our achievements as this is a sign of progress. It takes wisdom and maturity to ensure that there is no professional rivalry between the mentor and the mentee.

An Indonesian orthopaedic colleague recently remarked that as mentors we must demonstrate and uphold not only the highest professional values but personal values as well. In many ways, the relation between a mentor and mentee is similar to that between a parent and a child. Teaching and learning are like the two sides of a coin. It is always a two-way process as mentors also benefit by the critical questioning from their mentees leading to further clarity in their own thinking and understanding (2). An old English proverb states that a good surgeon has an eagle's eye, a lion's heart and a lady's hand. To these qualities we must add compassion, sound clinical judgement and mentoring.

References

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