

The Value of Having and Being a Great Female Mentor



Thinking of becoming a mentor? You might be further on your way than you think.

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In medicine, as in many other professions, mentors are invaluable to personal and professional growth. Thinking of this calls to mind a familiar mantra from medical school: “See one, do one, teach one.” As trainees, we are taught first to learn by observation, then to practice, and finally to solidify our skills by teaching others, making mentorship a cornerstone in our and others’ development.

Mentors can instill a passion—whether for retina or another field—in trainees. For many of us, a strong mentor, either male or female, was paramount in guiding our decision to become a physician, an ophthalmologist, and, eventually, a retina specialist.

TRAVELING SIMILAR ROADS

Female mentorship has been at the forefront of change in the business world; it is starting to get the same attention in medicine. For women in retina, having a mentor who is female is not necessary, but it can be of immense value.

The saying “If she can see it, she can be it” rings true in retina as it does in other fields. Female mentors offer perspectives and examples that male mentors cannot provide by their very nature. The female mentor enables the female mentee to envision herself functioning in a historically male-dominated field.

For those of us who have been fortunate to have a strong female mentor in residency or fellowship, seeing a woman work in the field affords an opportunity to imagine what one’s life as a retina specialist might look like. For a woman in retina, this picture may look different from one provided by a male mentor. It is important for younger women in retina to have and feel the support of those who may have followed similar paths or experienced similar circumstances.

OFFERING NEW EXAMPLES

Women may navigate differently from men when engaging in the business and academic aspects of retina. In these areas, female mentors can

offer an alternative example to young trainees of how to communicate effectively in the office and on the podium.

Women who join professional organizations dedicated to career development may hear from other women unique perspectives on issues such as contract negotiation, podium challenges, or work-life balance. To learn more, see the sidebar *Professional Organizations*.

Women leaders in retina can help develop a leadership pipeline that increases opportunities for speaking at conferences, nominations for leadership committees, or growth within large organizations. By promoting others in our field, women leaders may increase the profile of talented doctors who might otherwise go unnoticed.

AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Women in mentorship roles lead by example and serve as role models for trainees who need to picture themselves in leadership roles.
- ▶ Mentorship in the professional space is as important as mentorship in the medical space.
- ▶ Good mentors are also mentees. Seeking out a role model for mentorship will deepen your experience as a retina surgeon.



PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Female retina specialists have founded several professional organizations that invite aspiring women retina specialists and early practitioners to join and find mentors. These groups offer opportunities to meet and connect with other women in retina through formal and informal mentoring opportunities.

WOMEN IN RETINA

Founded in 2007, Women in Retina (WinR) is a section of the American Society of Retina Specialists (ASRS) open to all ASRS

members. WinR holds events at a number of meetings throughout the year, including the Retina Fellows' Forum, the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology Annual Meeting, the ASRS Annual Meeting, and Retina Subspecialty Day at the AAO Annual Meeting. Visit asrs.org/sections/women-in-retina to learn more about the events WinR is organizing in 2019.



WOMEN IN OPHTHALMOLOGY

The Women in Ophthalmology (WIO) Summer Symposium is a must-attend

for all ophthalmologists interested in curated scientific sessions and professional development workshops delivered by leading ophthalmic experts. This year's CME meeting is in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, August 22-25. WIO also hosts mentoring events at state and national meetings. The numerous awards given by WIO recognize outstanding female academic, scientific, and humanitarian achievements in ophthalmology. Go to WIOonline.org for more information on the meeting and membership opportunities.



OPHTHALMIC WORLD LEADERS

The slogan for Ophthalmic World Leaders (OWL) says it all: "Advancing diversity in leadership."

OWL began as Ophthalmic Women Leaders 15 years ago. In 2016, as the mission for the organization expanded from supporting women in ophthalmology to promoting diversity in the field, the group swapped *Women for World* in its name. OWL provides opportunities for professional and personal development and networking for all stakeholders across ophthalmology at a number of events throughout the year. As they look to expand their global impact in ophthalmology, those interested in learning more should visit OWLsite.org to explore.



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BEING A MENTEE

A good mentor helps you leverage your strengths to advance your training and career, and it is important to remember that mentorship is a two-way street. As a mentor, you should observe the other successful women you admire in your workplace, at meetings, and in training. Seek them out, and don't be afraid to engage them about challenges they've faced to get to their current positions or to ask them to act as a sounding board for a difficult situation you are navigating. Learning how the great mentors behave will in turn make you a better mentor.

GETTING STARTED

Mentoring stimulates personal, professional, and intellectual growth. Reflect on the presence or absence of female mentorship in your career and ask yourself how you can be a better champion for the women retina physicians around you.

Leading by example is powerful, and you're never too young to start mentoring others. Trainees who mentor medical students and residents will deepen their own training and begin to understand the gaps in their own knowledge.

Many mentoring relationships become lasting friendships. Be available to others, be open, and be willing to share your experiences and your challenges. ■

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