

Mentorship and Supervision: Two Sides of a Coin

Mentorship and supervision are two common words we are familiar with and use frequently and sometimes interchangeably. These two words even though, they have lots in common, they are not the same.

Mentorship is the influence, guidance or direction given by a mentor.¹ It is a process for transmission of not only knowledge but also social capital and psychosocial support relevant to work, career and professional development. On the other hand, supervision oversees the performance of an activity or task and keeps order or ensures that it is correctly done. A mentor is someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person.² While, a supervisor, on the other hand, ensures a task is completed as agreed.

Mentoring rooted its existence from the word Mentor son of Alcmus in Homer's Odysee. Although the Mentor in the story is portrayed as a somewhat ineffective old man, the goddess Athena assumes his appearance to guide young Telemachus in his time of difficulty.³

Therefore, while supervision is task oriented, for example, completion of a dissertation, mentorship is more about caring for an individual's long-term development. Mentoring may go alongside supervision, a supervisor, however, is not necessarily a mentor.

Despite these differences, a good mentor and a good supervisor are required for career advancement.

The need for and importance of a good mentoring relationship to career advancement and overall well-being of professionals have been well recognised.^{2,4} While some institutions are formalising a mentoring relationship, this appears still loose in most cases and the operations hanging, many others must look around for mentors themselves.

In this issue of the journal, Olorunmoteni *et al.*⁵ brought to the bare common issues and challenges in mentorship. They reported that though half of the paediatrics residents interviewed were in a mentorship relationship, this was initiated by their various institutions in only 25%. This indicates that more than 75% of those in mentoring relationship were done outside a formalised setting. It is either the student "shop" for mentor or vice versa. It is therefore not surprising while majority did not have a clear-cut idea of the whole process. Those who are not being mentored feel unloved, uncared for and are like orphans! This certainly calls for action.

Been in a mentoring relationship is one thing, deriving the benefits from it as expected is another issue. This concern was also expressed by residents where more than 60% of them were

not fully satisfied with the mentorship relationship. This sorts of a gap of unmet needs in mentoring are likely to happen in most formalised setting than individual-driven setup. There must be a way of ensuring a good match between mentor and mentees in formalised and institutional-based mentorship programmes.

Mentorship requires a strong commitment on both sides. There is an expectation of a mentee of the mentor just like a mentor has expectations of the mentee too. These individual expectations have to be met for the mentorship to be healthy, productive and long lasting. Both parties must be committed to ensuring this, though the pendulum may swing more to one side occasionally.

To make the mentorship process beneficial, it is better if it is institutionalised, frequently reviewed and reassessed. This would allow for monitoring and accountability. Even when a mentee is allowed to pick a mentor of interest, it should also be supervised and managed appropriately. Everyone must be encouraged in a mentoring relationship.

By the way the beneficial effect of mentorship goes beyond the two parties involved, the institution or the community also benefits. All those involved in a mentorship relationship need some form training and orientation or the other. This will not only ensure that expectations are well managed but will provide or enhance the skill sets required for effective mentorship.

Until these foundations and building blocks are laid, standing on the shoulders of giants may continue to be a mirage.

Adewole OO¹

¹Department of Medicine, Obafemi Awolowo University, Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals, Ile Ife, Nigeria

Address for correspondence: Prof. Adewole OO, Department of Medicine, Obafemi Awolowo University, Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals, Ile Ife, Nigeria. E-Mail: adewolef@yahoo.co.uk

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