

Mentoring: Giving Back to the Profession

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Hello, my name is Marc and I am a teacher. I have never been to a twelve-step-program meeting, but I admit that I have an addiction: I love to teach. I have been teaching the art and science of optometry, specifically pediatrics, optometric vision therapy and binocular vision for five years. I have loved every minute of it. I love working with the students in the clinic and classroom and guiding their natural curiosity. I also enjoy lecturing to optometrists concerning the trials and tribulations of working in this specialty. Perhaps my greatest experience is working with candidates attempting to complete the COVD Fellowship process.

For those who have attained the status of FCOVD, it represents a great deal of work and dedication. The letters FCOVD represent many things to many people. It represents to the optometric and lay community that a doctor has taken an extra step in training to be able to treat patients with vision related learning problems at the highest level. It represents to other Fellows that a doctor strives to be the best of the best. It gives Fellows a sense of pride that they have completed a rigorous process and that instead of standing on the shoulders of giants, they can stand side by side with them.

Last year, after several years of putting off the process I finally obtained my Fellowship. My mentor helped to guide me every step along the way and always seemed to have an answer to my questions. It

was such a great experience that I jumped head first into the process of mentoring other candidates the first chance I could. It is this experience that I would like to spend share with you. Besides working with patients, mentoring is the best way for most Fellows to give back to their profession. Mentors help other doctors help their patients.

As a mentor, you must be a one-person cheering section and critic at the same time. As this process is a journey for the candidate, you must be prepared to stand with him through thick or thin. You must help him see not only the forest but each and every tree. If a poor review is sent by the examination board, you must help the candidate work through the issues. When a good review is returned, you can revel in the same joy as the candidate.

I recently asked several mentors why they donated their time. Dr. John Abbondanza, the current chair of the Fellowship Committee said,

"I mentor because I genuinely believe in the Fellowship process. I see the process as a growth opportunity for behavioral optometrists, one which challenges the optometrist to think critically about their understanding of the visual process and how we can help our patients. Mentoring helps candidates continue to develop their own understanding of why they do what they do in testing and in vision therapy."

Past-president and mentor extraordinaire (25 past and current mentees), Dr. Robert Sanet agrees,

"The Fellowship process was one of the most important learning and growth experiences in my optometric career. I mentor because of the personal satisfaction that I get from working together with colleagues to facilitate their journey through the Fellowship process. In addition, I frequently gain important new learning and insight from the OD's I'm mentoring that helps me to expand and solidify my own model of vision."

Before agreeing to be a mentor, one must understand the process as it currently stands. If you

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have not mentored before or if it has been several years since you have gone through the process, speak with others who have mentored more recently. They can help you understand the current guidelines so that you can best help the candidate. Speak with the chair of the mentor committee prior to accepting this responsibility. They can also help you understand your role.

So what is the role of a mentor? You must check over all of the materials prior to them being sent in for review. I choose to read over the materials and provide the candidate feedback and questions for her to address. We may go back and forth on one question or case several times. This not only helps me understand the candidate and her thoughts but helps the candidate understand herself and her philosophy. As every person has a different learning style, you must learn how best to motivate each candidate. Some like more feedback and others less. Some like harsh criticism; others cannot handle it. Some like constant feedback; others will contact you only when necessary.

You have to be prepared to give up some of your time to help the candidate and be sure to help him in a timely manner. If the average candidate spends 100 hours on this process, the mentor should be prepared to spend about 25 hours checking over the material. Your job is to bring out the best in the candidate and get him to spread his wings. Your job is not to imprint your thoughts and philosophy, stifling his creativity, forcing his ideas to the background. Dr. Abbondanza agrees, "My goal in mentoring is to help the candidate find his voice. The philosophy is not to impose my model of vision on the candidate, but rather to help the candidate clarify his own model. I believe this is in the best interest of our profession, our patients, and our practices."

COVD has been providing this service to the profession for decades. Now that board certification is upon us, with COVD Fellowship as one part of the matrix, perhaps this is the time to help others help not only themselves, but their patients.

Please consider becoming a mentor!

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- Staff receiving training
- Therapy done at home
- Consultations
- Visually observable symptoms

... or any relevant interactions between doctors, staff, patients. Photos may be conceptual or representational.



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