

Editorial Mentors, Mentees, and Mentoring

In October 2018, the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) published a policy brief from the Office of Policy, Research, and Diversity titled "Our Future Faculty—The Importance of Recruiting Students and Residents to Academic Dentistry."¹ In this publication, the ADEA states that the dental faculty landscape is undergoing significant change due to the growing lack of educators. The report cites statistics that reflect this ever-shrinking pipeline of faculty: Only 0.4% of dental school seniors plan to teach upon graduation.¹

As the faculty continues to age and retire, recruiting younger candidates is paramount.

Attracting students and residents is an even greater challenge today due to rising tuition and mounting student debt, often precluding those who wish to pursue an academic career. Additionally, many institutions tend to hire only full-time instructors, exacerbating what will become a serious void in avail-

able faculty and, ultimately, a societal health problem.

Mentoring thrives when the experienced mentor paves the way through sharing their lessons and knowledge learned through academics and life experience. We all claim to have had the best mentors; the mere gift of having had a caring mentor prepares the mentee to face the challenges ahead. It is incumbent on all of us to share our knowledge and experience in order to fill this deepening void. Academia needs our expertise and our commitment of time. This profession has provided us with a livelihood and great joy over our careers—Now is the time to fortify this critical component of our profession by facing its future.

Mentorship is a two-way street. The mentor must be willing to give, and, just as important, the mentee must assume the responsibility to be an active participant in this exchange.

In my 44 years in dentistry, I have had the honor of being both

mentored and sponsored, and to this day I still turn to these individuals for guidance and wisdom. My affiliation with Columbia University reinforces the adage of "If you really want to master something, teach it."

The art of mentoring is an act of continuous learning. As G. V. Black, the father of modern dentistry, once said, "The professional person has no right to be other than a continuous student."²

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References

1. American Dental Education Association Office of Policy, Research, and Diversity. Our Future Faculty—The Importance of Recruiting Students and Residents to Academic Dentistry (Policy Brief October 2018). Accessed 1 June 2022. <https://www.adea.org/policy/publications/ourfuturefaculty/>
2. Joseph R. The Father of Modern Dentistry—Dr. Greene Vardiman Black (1836–1915). *J Conserv Dent* 2005; 8:5–6.