

Establishing effective relationships with role models and peers

Developing a career in academic medicine requires you, as a clinical academic, to become very proactive about seeking out your own sources of advice, guidance and support. Throughout your career you are able to benefit from a variety of sources of career development support.

1. Mentoring from a more senior colleague

In identifying a potential mentor it is important to be clear about what you are looking for and why you are choosing a particular individual. It may seem obvious to choose the most successful person in your field but status and career success in itself does not necessarily make a great mentor. It is more important to choose someone who has good mentoring skills (is approachable, listens well, is interested in developing junior colleagues) and is able to give some time to you on a regular basis.

There may be a formal mentoring programme in your area via the Deanery, the NHS Trust or the University. If not, it is often best to ask senior colleagues or peers who they would recommend.

In making an initial approach it is helpful to be able to talk about what you need from the relationship, how often you might want to meet and your understanding of confidentiality. It is important to choose someone who is outside your day-to-day role and responsibilities in order to benefit from an independent and objective perspective.

2. Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring relationships are normally made up of 2 or 3 colleagues, at similar levels in their careers, meeting regularly to offer and receive mentoring support to each other. To be effective, participants need all the skills of traditional mentoring and also a clear framework about how to share time and what the limits and boundaries of the relationship are.

In choosing peers, it is equally important to choose people who are separate from your day to day work and who can therefore give you unbiased support and advice. Use the Academy's networking events and meetings to identify potential peer mentors.

3. Maximising networks

The task here is to actively seek out opportunities for support and development in the normal run of meetings and conferences which we all attend. Being an effective networker involves not only making connections and contacts for yourself but also looking for ways of connecting your colleagues. To be really effective, conversations and action agreed at events need to be followed up quickly. Networking is also an important way of raising your profile and keeping your career visible.