

The Mentor-Student Relationship in Research and Publication

Chair:

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Speakers:

David Moher

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Edward J Huth

Annals of Internal Medicine
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

Ana Marusic

Croatian Medical Journal
Zagreb, Croatia

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The mentor-student relationship is an important aid to students in completing their degrees and in teaching them about the ethics and arguments surrounding research and publication. The presenters at this session tackled the issue of the mentor's role in the life of a student.

David Moher, director of the Thomas C Chalmers Centre for Systematic Review, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, described the mentor-student relationship on the basis of his experiences in the university environment. To be an effective student or mentor, Moher said, one must behave ethically, be a good communicator and listener, and discuss and set

appropriate boundaries. A good mentor is a confidence-builder. Because the research world is highly competitive, is often lonely, and can be full of rejections, mentors play an important role in reassuring and guiding students.

One of the most important topics to both mentors and students is the peer-review system. Moher had observed that peer review gets little attention from administrators and faculty. But he believes that it is important for mentors to teach their students about all aspects of research and publication, including how the peer-review system works, how to deal with

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ethical issues such as data ownership and authorship, and how to review a paper.

The presenters agreed that students must be careful in picking mentors. They suggested that students look for mentors who are relatively established and secure in their careers, rather than people who are not yet tenured. They agreed that one's official adviser might not be the best choice and that even looking outside one's home department can be helpful.

Ana Marusic, editor-in-chief of the *Croatian Medical Journal*, brought a different viewpoint to the discussion, coming from a small country torn apart by war in recent years. Because of the war, she said,

science in general and scientific writing in particular have developed poorly in Croatia. She decided to start the *Croatian Medical Journal* not only to record the impact of war on medicine in Croatia, but to encourage students and colleagues to write.

Marusic said that courses have been organized to teach professionals and students proper writing and article organization. The courses include attention to ethical issues such as authorship and peer review. The response has been positive, and interest in writing has increased. Authors from Croatia have 15 to 20 articles printed in major international journals each year.

Marusic ended by noting that the teaching process must start early in students' academic careers and that early education in scientific writing leads to better student-teacher relationships.

Edward J Huth, editor emeritus of *Annals of Internal Medicine*, wrapped up the session by expanding on the topics discussed by Moher and Marusic. He added to the definition of a mentor by emphasizing that mentors differ from advisers in their greater personal contact and close relationships with the students—attributes, he said, that are often missing from the adviser-student relationship.

Huth agreed with Moher about the apparent indifference of many academic persons to ethics and conduct in research. After discussing authorship with various faculty members, Huth said, he was struck by the range of views given. He said he found a lack of consensus about whether authorship standards should exist. He believes that the chaos will continue until standards are developed and implemented. ⑥