

### MENTORS AND MENTORING

More than 100 years ago, a medical student at John Hopkins Medical School nervously approached the amphitheatre where Dr Osler, the professor of medicine, was to conduct his weekly clinic. He watched with envy as senior students, residents and physicians took their places. By tradition, junior students were not welcome, or, on the occasion when there was room, banished to the back.

"Just before I got to the entrance of the amphitheater, some one came up and ran his arm through mine and asked where I was going. I looked up, and, behold, there was Dr Osler! I told him I had started toward the pathologic laboratory, and he said, 'Why go there? I thought you might be coming to my clinic.' I said, 'Dr Osler, I'm not yet a third year medical student.'"

"All the better. Come along with me." Whereupon Osler directed him to a chair in the front row as he began his clinic. Afterwards, Osler extended an open invitation to the student to attend his clinics.\*

This particular student was to become one of the foremost medical consultants in the US, physician to President Franklin Roosevelt, and a leader of American medicine at the highest level.

This story resonates with most of us. We have all been influenced by mentors who have inspired and supported us, and invested effort and time on our behalf. They have freely taught, counselled, criticised and comforted us on our professional journeys.

All this takes time, continuity of contact, and a "giving" culture. Unfortunately, such precious mentoring is slowly disappearing from our time-poor, fragmented and dehumanised health systems, and perhaps even from our medical schools.

The future does not augur well for mentors and mentoring.



Martin B Van Der Weyden

\* Paullin JE. My first medical clinic with Dr Osler. *Arch Intern Med* 1949; 84: 84-85.

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