

Mentoring Tips

Establishing a mentoring relationship with a knowledgeable professional can lead to increased success throughout your medical education. The following tips should help you choose the right mentor and define the relationship that is right for you.

- **Contact the dean's office early in your first year of medical school.** Find out if the school provides a formal mentoring mechanism for medical students. Identifying a mentor (trusted counselor or guide) early in your medical education ensures that you have a personal advocate and resource throughout medical school.
- **If your school does not offer a formal mentoring program, seek out opportunities to meet physicians and other faculty.** If a special lecturer impresses you, find out from the dean's office how to contact him or her. If you are excited about a journal article or research project, track down the author. If you have a favorite preceptor, tell this individual how much you enjoy working with him or her. Get involved in special interest groups on campus. Contact state medical societies to help you identify potential mentor candidates. If you are interested in family medicine, contact your state's chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians (www.aafp.org/cgi-bin/chapterlookup).
- **When considering a physician as a possible mentor, look for certain characteristics.** Seek out an individual who has 1) a diverse background and interests that are similar to yours; 2) a good rapport with students; 3) an open mind and appears committed to student development; and 4) knowledge in the areas you have the most interest.
- **Once you have identified a physician that you would like to have as your mentor, initiating this relationship is simple.** Approach the individual and ask if he or she would be willing to advise you. You and your mentor should agree upon the nature of the relationship early on. Use time with your mentor to discuss expectations of the relationship, goals, concerns, career interests, grades and big picture issues.
- **Circumstances may lead to acquiring more than one mentor.** Though it would be ideal to have one mentor throughout medical school, the dynamic nature of the curriculum and your evolving interests may necessitate that you change mentors during the course of your medical education. You should address your changing interests with your first mentor before establishing a formal relationship with another mentor.
- **Once your specialty choice is determined, it is valuable to have a physician mentor from your specialty area to advise you through the Match.** Your ideal mentor will be 1) one who knows you well; 2) understands the Match process and, possibly, has connections at residency programs; and 3) a person who — unlike an assigned advisor who may have many students to counsel — has time to spend with you.