Mentorship: an unspoken obligation

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I will learn” – Benjamin Franklin

Many years ago, I was attending a continuing education conference. I happened to be invited as a guest speaker. There was one student in particular who seemed to be strategically placed in my path who had what seemed to be an endless cache of questions. Should I be annoyed or was it an opportunity? Fortunately, the student was like a sponge, taking in everything that was stated and then asking more questions. As time went on in later years, that same individual seemed to intercept me at other venues with the same sense of curiosity and inquiry. That relationship grew and, over time, we became good friends, but even today the questions keep coming. There was the humbling realization that the accrual of one’s experience could possibly benefit another. This encounter was undertaken with no forethought that it might serve a more significant lesson than just addressing a set of questions. The experience was one of mentorship.

Medical education and training is one of those revolving doors by which new people continuously enter and leave one’s domain. There are always visitors, students of various backgrounds and interests and residents and physicians who cycle through one’s operating room, ICU or laboratory. Questions abound, stories are told and experiences shared. Some professional connection may serve to help clean up. Some novice wants to run for the door, but others stay and some may even offer to help clean up. Some professional connection may develop, but the opportunity to teach, guide and direct that individual is an opportunity. It is often one of those tough choices when, late at night after seemingly hours of cardiopulmonary bypass are anticipated, a fresh-eyed student might come up to you and ask, “Can you explain to me how your machine works?” or “What does cardioplegia solution do?” or “What operation are they doing?”

Publication should be considered one form of mentorship. The journal and the elements involved in the publication process are the mentors. Authors submit a manuscript in which a test hypothesis or a case study or series is presented. The process of dealing with the reviewers’ comments and the editor’s critique, as well as the time involved in revising a paper may be like that young student trying to formulate and comprehend the process. As ideas become clearer, the peer-review process attempts to not only weed out imperfections, but mold a better product when carried to conclusion. Valuable experience comes when authors embrace the opportunity to gain experience from the comments from the review and make the manuscript better. Vital experience is also gained by the reviewers who can benchmark their comments with those of the other anonymous reviewers. Authors who fail to respond and take advantage of the review process will find their manuscript drops out of sight—a mentorship potential lost. Publication can be long and sometimes frustrating, but, like a student, the acceptance of a manuscript shows persistence, growth, success and mastery. The moment of accomplishment comes when the article appears in print. The final result adds to the body of knowledge.

The current volume of Perfusion shows this process. Many of the authors reporting herein may be relatively new to publication, while others have had to persevere by having their studies recognized. Has the journal mentored the authors in this process? Undoubtedly it has. With the variety of topics appearing in this volume, some are of particular interest, including topics on ischemic preconditioning (Moscarelli), scoring systems related to outcomes (Rubino), collateral circulation and risk markers (Gur), hemolysis related to hypertriglyceridermia (Venado), oxidative inhibitors and reperfusion (Ozguler), circuit modeling (Okahara), air embolism related to a fistula (Koa-Wing), inflammatory response from miniaturized circuits (Ti), antegrade cerebral perfusion (Fukuhara) and cognitive factor changes (Messerotti). It is an impressive offering on the many facets of what we call perfusion.

As for the student I met those many years back, that person has become an accomplished perfusionist and mentor. I also strongly suspect others have indirectly benefited from that initial mentorship, which has multiplied because that individual frequently contributes to papers published and reviewed in this journal. Certainly, the quality of everything we do each day can perpetuate mentorship endeavors by handing down those experiences and knowledge to the new generation of practitioners. It is a humbling, yet totally rewarding effort to sometimes glimpse positive results from a seemingly chance encounter to mentor others. To the authors and others who contribute in this way, we express gratitude.

John M Toomasian
Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA
Section Editor