EDITORIAL

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Can a virtual on-line nation-wide mentorship-matching process meet the need?

In Homer's 8th century BC Greek epic poem "Odyssey", Odysseus, upon leaving town to do battle for an extended period, could not have done better than to leave his son, Telemachus, in the care of a trusted friend, Mentor. Thus, "mentorship" can be seen as a key process, whereby a more experienced individual takes on an advisor role for a less-experienced colleague.

FIGURE. "Mentor and Telemachus" From Pablo E. Fabisch, illustration for Aventuras de Telémaco by François Fénelon (1651-1715).

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Manuscript submitted 9th March, 2020

Manuscript accepted 9th March, 2020

Clin Invest Med 2020; 43 (1): E39-40.

I would wager that, in keeping with my own experience, most of my close colleagues have benefitted enormously from fruitful relationships with one or more mentors. Fittingly, the advice and expertise of senior mentors is highly valued amongst the physician-scientist trainees I have come to know both within our Leaders in Medicine Programme at the University of Calgary and amongst physician-scientist trainees from other institutions I have met over the past 20 years at our Clinician Scientist Trainee Association of Canada (CITAC) Annual Young Investigators Forum. Indeed, mentorship has been identified as an important issue for the training of Canadian physician-scientists by the Canadian National Consensus Conference dealing with the training of physician-scientists [2].

In this issue of *Clinical and Investigative Medicine*, Mirali and her CITAC colleagues [3] underscore the need for mentors by physician scientist trainees. This opinion reinforces the message of a previous CITAC publication [4]. The present article by Mirali and colleagues shows that although informal mentorship relationships do indeed thrive and are strongly promoted, there is a lack of national structured peer-to-peer and student-to-faculty mentorship opportunities in our physician-scientist training programmes. Further, the authors report that the availability of “clinician-scientist mentors” at any individual institution appears to be limited. To the credit of CITAC, a trainee-initiated nation-wide Mentorship Match Program was launched in 2019 to foster on-line virtual mentorship opportunities for all trainees across the country. This pilot mentorship match initiative, to be continued this year, indicates that a long-distance cross-country mentorship arrangement is feasible, thereby providing expanded opportunities for our physician-scientist trainees to obtain mentorship guidance.

Mirali and her colleagues point out that there are indeed challenges that this “virtual mentorship” plan will face, not only to maintain long-term mentorship relationships, but also to provide an alternative to on-site interactions. Further, there are the challenges of the mentorship process itself, as outlined by the literature cited by her and others [5] and by our own trainees here in Calgary [6].

To sum up, thanks to our CITAC colleagues, an important gap in our Canadian physician-scientist training programmes has been singled out, and a potential solution has been put in place to optimize mentorship possibilities across the country. While the virtual CITAC mentorship process may not replace the more traditional on-site arrangements, this commendable initiative will meet needs that are not sufficiently dealt with currently in our MD-MSc-PhD training programmes. I strongly encourage all of us,

trainees and potential mentors alike, to join in this coming April to support this CITAC initiative.

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