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# The best advice for mentoring young spine surgeons

Written by Anuja Vaidya | May 03, 2018 | [Print](#) | [Email](#)



Five spine surgeons discuss the key aspects of successful professional mentoring.

***Ask Spine Surgeons*** is a weekly series of questions posed to spine surgeons around the country about clinical, business and policy issues affecting spine care. We invite all spine surgeon and specialist responses.

***Next week's question: Will you be participating in BPCI Advanced? If not, why?***

Please send responses to Anuja Vaidya at [avaidya@beckershealthcare.com](mailto:avaidya@beckershealthcare.com) by **Wednesday, May 9, at 5 p.m. CST.**

**Question: What is the most important aspect of mentoring young spine surgeons?**

**Alden Milam, MD. Spine Surgeon at OrthoCarolina (Charlotte, N.C.):** Understand their goals and then suggest programs, methods and relationships to accomplish those goals.

**Rey Bosita, MD. Spine Surgeon at Texas Back Institute (Plano):** The most important aspect of having a truly productive relationship between a young surgeon and his or her mentor is a strong foundation of trust.

The mentee must feel that the mentor truly has his or her best interests at heart. The mentee must feel confident enough to ask any question without feeling embarrassed or dumb.

On the other hand, the mentor must understand that the mentee may be young, enthusiastic and knowledgeable, but not necessarily as wise or experienced as someone who has been in practice for a few years. The mentor must help the mentee understand both the clinical and surgical decision-making processes that lead to good, reproducible outcomes.

A good mentoring relationship is fulfilling and fruitful for both mentor and mentee, who should find that this relationship adds value to them professionally and personally.

**Payam Farjoodi, MD. Orthopedic Spine Surgeon at Spine Health Center at MemorialCare Orange Coast Medical Center (Fountain Valley, Calif.):** Being patient. Graduated autonomy is a term I like to describe the best training programs. As a young surgeon becomes more and more comfortable, increasing his or her responsibility accordingly is the best way to learn. Mistakes will be made, but those are some of the most important lessons. A good mentor expects these road bumps and already has plans to address them when they arise.

**Brian R. Gantwerker, MD. Founder of the Craniospinal Center of Los Angeles:** I'm still a young spine surgeon myself, but I feel if I were an older me mentoring a younger me, I would say be patient. Technical aspects of surgery and their refinement take time. You will become more efficient. Things will not always go your way. Remember to operate on patients, not films. Listen. Take [down patient] history and a physical comprehensively. Always double check your film dates. Never dismiss a patient who has questions to ask you.

**Isador H Lieberman, MD. Spine Surgeon at Texas Back Institute (Plano):** The decision is more important than the incision — there are so many distractions during the effort of providing care [to] patients, great mentoring teaches the student to cull the distractions and make the correct decision.

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