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# Mentorship that Heals: Leading With Kindness in Medicine

Caroline Nguyen

Medicine is a rigorous field that challenges individuals in many ways that compound with inevitable personal struggles encountered outside of training. Certainly throughout medical school students are embarking on their journeys to become medical professionals, but often they are also undergoing personal growth during this already critical period in their lives. Many students will undoubtedly undergo “growing pains” in both their personal and professional development during these formative years. For this reason, mentorship in medicine should be healing for students and trainees, just as physicians serve as healers for their patients.

Dr. CR serves as a prime example of a mentor who leads with kindness and is one of the most beloved faculty at my institution, due to her caring nature demonstrated by her kind leadership style. In her own right, she is an accomplished woman in medicine, which includes being an abdominal transplant surgeon, conducting research in the Department of Neurobiology, heading the Willed Body Program, and serving as the co-director for our first basic science course and first organ system course. At the start of the midterm week of one of her courses, I was broken up with by a partner of many years I was looking forward to marrying after medical school; after a few text messages and a phone call, my life plans were shattered. I emailed Dr. R that due to my emotional pain I could not participate in “What’s Anatomically Correct?”, the fun *Jeopardy*-styled review session she hosted weekly in which I was due to participate in only a few days. She responded, “I am sorry to hear that you are having problems. Please let me know if I can be of any help. You can come and talk to me at any time.” This led to me sobbing to her for hours in her office, to which she listened intently and initiated the healing process for my emotional wounds. One piece of comfort she offered was that my life is too meaningful and my future is too bright to jeopardize because of temporary pain, no matter how immense and valid. Years later, although I have since completed the pre-clinical courses she directs, we maintain a relationship as former student faculty and catch up over coffee periodically about life inside and outside of medicine.

This experience with Dr. R was critical in my professional development, as her providing me with that safe space to vent about my personal problems gave me the strength to continue through the academic rigors of medical school despite embarking on a personal healing journey triggered by the breakup. Her leadership style also showed me that it is possible for some of the most successful and respected people to remain kind and patient, despite giving so much time and effort to others. While caring for my personal struggles, these moments with my mentor reinvigorated my perseverance to fight for my future as a physician. Knowing that I had a mentor who genuinely cared about my wellness as an individual, not just my wellness as a student, especially in some of my darkest moments, invigorated me to work relentlessly toward my dream of becoming a physician, while still leading with kindness and authenticity. Just as she cared for me as both a student and an individual, I will also provide for my patients' pathologies and wellness.

