

Will you be my mentor?

EDITORIAL

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Mentoring schemes foster a collegial community, enhance well-being and boost confidence among medical students and junior doctors.



Photo: Sturlason

The transition from medical student to doctor can be overwhelming. Even after receiving their medical licence, many still feel inadequate [\(1\)](#). A guiding hand can help make the transition less dramatic.

A few years ago, a student asked in the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association whether she would ever feel like a doctor [\(2\)](#). I sometimes ask myself the same question – even now, a year after receiving my medical licence. I suspect I have well-informed hypochondriac friends who feel more like a doctor than I do.

During clinical placement in my medical studies, many of the doctors I met seemed to wear their white coat with absolute confidence. The hollow, purposeful sound during percussion, the assured tone in every question, not a hint of hesitation in making clinical decisions, and the elegant medical notes. More than once, I made awkward attempts to hide my all-consuming admiration – and a troubling feeling that life as a doctor might become a Sisyphean task for me.

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'Accumulated experience carries considerable weight in clinical medicine', states another article in the Journal, perfectly illustrating the value of the seasoned mentor that some of us are fortunate enough to encounter in hospitals (3). We need to utilise such encounters more effectively and more frequently.

A mentor is more than just a supervisor; they should serve as a teacher, role model, adviser and source of support (4, 5). In a mentoring scheme, a more experienced person invests their own knowledge, energy and time to help a less experienced person develop and improve (6). Mentoring schemes are particularly important in the medical profession – not only for those receiving support but also for those providing it (6). The mentee can improve their stress management skills, while the mentor may feel a sense of satisfaction and recognition from their colleagues (6, 7).

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In Norway, mentoring schemes have been shown to foster a collegial community, increase well-being and improve confidence (8). While studying in Budapest, I did not encounter any mentoring schemes, but through my work with the Journal, I have learned that all Norwegian university cities offer some form of mentoring scheme.

At the University of Bergen, medical students are required to participate in a mentoring scheme for two years. Groups of about eight students meet with a mentor and a student mentor to discuss, among other things, how students learn to become 'real doctors'. This is partly attributed to an informal curriculum: 'The role of doctor [...] is conveyed through the words and actions of role models' (9).

At the University of Oslo, medical students can voluntarily join mentor groups through the Oslo Medical Association. The structure is not fixed, but one of the aims is for students to have the opportunity to discuss experiences, feelings, ethics and other topics related to the role of doctor and medical student. These groups meet 2–4 times per year (10).

In the mentoring scheme at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, first-year medical students can consult with students in the years above them. The student mentors hold Q&A sessions for first, second and third-year students each autumn and spring. These sessions usually focus on study techniques and exams, but one-on-one conversations are also offered. They also have what they call a 'doctor and student service', where students can ask doctors questions about the medical profession (11).

In Tromsø, the mentoring scheme is an integral and mandatory part of medical studies. A group of eight students have the same mentor throughout the entire six years of study. Twice a year, they have a compulsory one-on-one meeting with the same doctor (12).

If there is no mentoring scheme at your place of study, you can take matters into your own hands. If you come across an inspiring professor or clinician who works in your ideal field, why not ask if they would be willing to give you and your fellow students some extra guidance? Suggest regular meetings throughout the semester. You could discuss ethical dilemmas, interesting case studies, the responsibilities that come with being a doctor, and various personal and professional goals (13, 14).

I encourage medical students to get involved in a mentoring scheme – whether it's an established one or something you start yourself. As a student, I did not have the opportunity to participate in a mentoring scheme, but next time I am inspired by a potential mentor, I will set aside my pride and ask, 'Will you be my mentor?' Hopefully, this article will also motivate some of my doctor colleagues to say yes.

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Publisert: 18 August 2025. Tidsskr Nor Legeforen. DOI: 10.4045/tidsskr.25.0433
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