



# Speed Mentoring: An Innovative Method to Meet the Needs of the Young Surgeon

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**OBJECTIVE:** Speed mentoring has recently been used by several medical organizations as a strategy to establish mentoring relationships, which are felt to be critically important in the development of the surgeon. This study assesses a surgical speed-mentoring program at the 2015 American College of Surgeons (ACS) Clinical Congress.

**DESIGN:** A steering committee designed the speed-mentoring program to match 60 ACS Resident and Associate Society mentees with a mix of junior and senior leadership of ACS. Each mentee met with 5 mentors for 10 minutes each during the 1 hour session. After participation in the activity, surveys were provided to assess the event. The survey included forced-choice questions using Likert-scales as well as open-ended questions. Mentor and mentee responses were compared using Medcalc software using comparison of means and comparison of proportion, with  $p < 0.05$  considered significant.

**SETTING:** The study was undertaken at the 2015 ACS Clinical Congress.

**PARTICIPANTS:** A total of 60 mentors and 49 mentees participated in the inaugural ACS Speed-Mentoring activity. The postactivity survey was completed by 54 mentors (90%) and 39 mentees (79.5%).

**RESULTS:** There was a high level of satisfaction with the activity, with 100% of mentors and mentees stating that they would recommend the activity to a colleague. There

was overall high satisfaction with the organization of the session by both the mentors and the mentees although the mentors were more likely to feel that they needed more time for each interaction. More mentees (93%) than mentors (68.5%) felt they were likely to develop a mentoring relationship with one of their matches outside of the organized session.

**CONCLUSIONS:** We demonstrated that a speed-mentoring event at a national surgical meeting offers an effective platform for mentoring and is mutually beneficial to both mentors and mentees. Data collected here will be used to modify and improve the design of future speed-mentoring sessions. (J Surg Ed 74:1007-1011. © 2017 Association of Program Directors in Surgery. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.)

**KEY WORDS:** speed mentoring, mentoring, young surgeons

**COMPETENCIES:** Interpersonal and Communication Skills, Professionalism

## INTRODUCTION

Mentorship is essential in any field for both professional and personal development at all stages of one's career. Numerous texts and courses have been written on the topic, but fundamentally it involves the dynamics of a relationship between 2 individuals. Both individuals in the mentor-mentee relationship have important roles.<sup>1</sup> Critical, though, to the success of mentorship is identifying the best mentor for each mentee. Often, mentors are designated by happenstance (the mentor has a supervisory role to the mentee) or the mentor is at the same institution and is easily accessible.

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In other situations, however, the mentee actively identifies an individual who is at a remote location or in a disparate field. Such interactions can be more challenging to establish. The inability to find an appropriate mentor is often cited by underrepresented minorities as a barrier to their entry into certain fields.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, geography and simple lack of institutional availability can also be limitations to finding an appropriate mentor.

Like in other professional fields, mentorship is critically important in the development of the surgeon, not only in early stages of training, but continuing well into practice and leadership. Two major leadership organizations, the Women in Surgery Committee of the American College of Surgeons (ACS) (WiSC) and the Young Fellows Association of the ACS (ACS-YFA), recognized that need and have established mentorship programs to help in overcoming barriers that individuals have in finding appropriate mentees. In both programs, applications were solicited from both mentors and mentees, a comprehensive evaluation was performed by a committee to evaluate commonality of objectives, and then pairings were made to establish longitudinal mentorship relationships. The mentor-mentee pairings were periodically re-evaluated and program is accordingly refined over time.

A new model of establishing mentor-mentee relationships is often referred to as “speed mentoring.” The phrase is a play on words of “speed dating,” a technique pioneered by Rabbi Yaacov Deyo in Los Angeles in the late 1990s as a way to introduce young Jewish singles to each other.<sup>3</sup> The method involves brief opportunities for two individuals to meet with each other, often for as little as 5 to 10 minutes. Speed mentoring has recently been used by several medical organizations as a strategy to establish mentoring relationships. A Medline search reveals 4 letters to the editor or full article describing the use of speed mentoring in their programs. (Medline search 11/20/2015). The size of the mentee groups varied from 7 to 60 with a variety of durations of experience<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>

The ACS-YFA, WiSC as well as the ACS Resident and Associate Society (ACS-RAS) and the ACS Committee on Diversity Issues were interested in capitalizing on the purported benefits of the speed-mentoring model for attendees of the 2015 ACS Clinical Congress. To that end, a speed-mentoring experience was established, and attendees were queried as to their impressions of the event.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The speed-mentoring event was cosponsored by the ACS-YFA, ACS-RAS, WiSC, and the ACS Committee on Diversity Issues. A steering committee was established to plan and execute the speed-mentoring session, including members from each of the sponsoring committees. Mentees were recruited from the ACS-RAS electronic mailing list, a variety of ACS newsletters and online communities, and

social media including Facebook and Twitter 3 months before the event. Any member in good standing of ACS-RAS was eligible to be a mentee; they were accepted in the order in which they responded. Mentors were solicited from ACS membership using online communities, ACS newsletters, and electronic mailings. An effort was made to create a diverse pool of mentors, with leaders from the ACS-YFA as well as senior leadership of the ACS represented. We also sought a diversity of specialties, age, career setting and stage, and areas of mentoring interest.

Sixty mentees were chosen for participation; the remaining applicants were placed on a waiting list. Mentees were asked to select three main topics of interest for the mentoring session out of 12 options (Table 1). Mentor applicants were asked to provide a brief biosketch or brief background summary. They were also asked to select 3 of the above mentoring topics that they felt most comfortable discussing with mentees. Twelve groups with 5 mentors with similar mentoring interests were created. Mentoring groups was created in a manner that maximized diversity of seniority, practice experience, and geography. Mentees, in groups of 5, were then assigned to a mentor group according to area of interest.

The speed-mentoring event took place during the annual ACS Clinical Congress in Chicago, IL. Each of the 12 groups was organized into a circle of tables that included 5 tables. The mentors were assigned to a specific table, and mentees rotated through the tables in a clockwise fashion within the group. Each mentor and mentee pair interacted for 10 minutes for a total of 5 sessions. Five minutes at the end of the session were used for wrap-up and evaluation of the session.

The speed-mentoring committee developed a postactivity survey for both mentors and mentees. The survey was not piloted but was based on surveys designed for other ACS mentoring programs as well as on the survey described by Serwint et al.<sup>7</sup> in their work describing speed mentoring in a pediatric academic organization. The 15 question surveys included forced-choice questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) about the overall impressions of the event and interactions with other participants. Open-ended questions were used to collect

**TABLE 1.** Topics for Speed-Mentoring Program

Negotiating a contract
Choosing a specialty
Academic career
Employed physician
Private practice career
Finding a job
Work/life issues
Being a surgeon parent
Research career
Leadership skills
Local mentorship
Surgical education
Getting involved in the ACS

**TABLE 2.** Overall Impression of Event, Percentage of Participants Who Either "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed"; Average Likert Score in Parenthesis (Range: 1-5, 5 Being Highly Satisfied)

	Mentors	Mentees	p Value
Event well organized	98% (4.5)	100% (4.7)	0.93
Registration easy	93% (4.4)	100% (4.8)	0.25
Meeting space adequate	85% (4.2)	97.5 (4.8)	0.09
Enough time to meet	72% (4.4)	93% (4.5)	0.02

information regarding topics discussed, suggestions offered/received, goals for participation in the program, and suggestions for improvement. A combination of question types was used to collect demographic information including gender, surgical specialty, and current practice setting.

The quantitative questions were analyzed using Medcalc software using comparison of means and comparison of proportion, with  $p < 0.05$  considered significant. Mentor and mentee responses were compared. Qualitative responses were analyzed and sorted into general themes for simplicity of reporting.

## RESULTS

A total of 60 mentors and 49 mentees participated in the inaugural ACS Speed-Mentoring activity. During that hour-long session, 245 ten-minute mentor-mentee interactions took place. The postactivity survey was completed by 54 mentors (90%) and 39 mentees (79.5%). The mentors represented a wide variety of surgery specialties, including Trauma, General Surgery, General Surgery subspecialties, Urology, and Otolaryngology. The mentee participants were all ACS-RAS members and represented a variety of surgical specialties. There was a gender difference between mentors and mentees, with the majority of mentors being male (70%) and the majority of mentees female (64%),  $p = 0.002$ .

There was a high level of satisfaction with the activity, with 100% of mentors and mentees stating that they would recommend the activity to a colleague. There was overall high satisfaction with the organization of the session by both the mentors and the mentees although the mentors were more likely to feel that they needed more time (Table 2). The mentors and mentees both felt the

discussions were relevant to the career goals of the mentees with useful information provided (Table 3). More mentees (93%) than mentors (68.5%) felt they were likely to develop a mentoring relationship with one of their matches outside of the organized session.

The participants reported that a large variety of topics were discussed, including career goals and transition to practice, research and grant funding, involvement in the ACS and societies, burnout, work/life balance, and global opportunities. The mentees received advice on a variety of topics and unanimously felt the program met their goals. Examples of advice given included the importance of networking to make connections, the value of fellowship training, and the importance of having mentors, advice about research, how to join committees and societies, and how to obtain research funding. There were several areas for improvement suggested by the participants, including a larger room with better acoustics, better organization upon arrival and seating, increased time for each interaction to 15 minute, and providing a biosketch of both the mentees as well as the mentors before the session to facilitate introduction. The mentors commented that the best interactions were those in which the mentee clearly had the questions prepared ahead of time.

## DISCUSSION

Mentoring relationships are mutually beneficial and reciprocally advantageous interactions for both the mentee and the mentor. High quality mentoring relationships are known to affect the professional and personal lives of the mentor and mentee. Mentoring relationships with their inherent reciprocity lead to personal growth, interdependence and connectedness among the pairs.<sup>8,9</sup>

The inaugural Speed-Mentoring event at the ACS 101st Annual Clinical Congress was very well received with 100% of mentee and mentor respondents noting that the interaction was comfortable and welcoming, the discussion was focused on the career objectives of the mentee, and that the information and advice was useful and beneficial. The event was strategically placed early in the 4-day conference allowing mentees further opportunity to apply their networking throughout the Clinical Congress.

The benefits of speed mentoring have been extrapolated from the speed dating concept<sup>3</sup> and have been emulated

**Table 3.** Overall Interactions; Percentage of Participants Who Either "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed"; Average Likert Score in Parenthesis

	Mentors	Mentees	p Value
Interaction comfortable	100% (4.9)	100% (4.7)	1
Discussion pertained to career goals of mentee	100% (4.8)	100% (4.8)	1
Useful information/advice given	100% (4.6)	100% (4.8)	1
Likely to develop mentoring relationship outside of session	68.5% (4.0)	93% (4.5)	0.009

previously in academic medicine in a specific population by the American Pediatric Association.<sup>7</sup> The specific aims of a speed-mentoring program are to provide multiple brief opportunities for networking, with the potential that these interactions could lead to a mentoring match. Our goal was to further bolster this in the surgical field by expanding to all surgical disciplines represented by the ACS.

A systematic review by Kashiwagi et al.<sup>10</sup> identified 7 essential components of a formal mentoring program: mentor preparation, mentor-mentee interaction, planning committees, funding, formal curricula, mentor-mentee pairing, and mentoring activities. Of these, mentor-mentee pairing received the most focus indicating that appropriate matching of the mentor and mentee is a critical component for perceived success on behalf of the participants. The speed-mentoring format allows mentees to briefly interact with potential mentors, allowing them the ability to pursue mentorship from an individual with whom there is a certain degree of chemistry. The ability of the speed-mentoring format to facilitate effective mentor-mentee pairing is demonstrated by the fact that 93% of mentees noted that they would likely develop mentoring relationships outside of the speed-mentoring event. Our data demonstrate that speed mentoring has the potential to facilitate mentor-mentee pairing among practicing surgeons and trainees.

A myriad of specific benefits may be postulated and identified for surgical trainees across the surgical disciplines based on their participation in this speed-mentoring event. General surgery candidates are exposed to a variety of surgical specialties with direct feedback from mentors in these areas; discussions about clinical, research and educational aspects as well as work-life balance concerns were addressed during this inaugural event. Furthermore, the event promoted a horizontal approach to interactions with more senior staff in addition to supporting collaboration and networking. All of the mentees who responded to the survey reported that the discussion was focused on them and their career goals.

The benefits, however, are mutual for both the mentee and the mentor. Mentors describe a “mutual developmental partnership of great collegiality” leading to shared satisfaction for both the mentor and mentee.<sup>11</sup> All of the mentors who participated in our inaugural session reported that they would recommend the program to a colleague and that useful information was given to the mentees. Despite the brevity of the mentor-mentee interactions inherent to the speed-mentoring framework, the results of our mentor survey suggest that the mentors did experience some of the known benefits of being a mentor. In addition to their support of the program, the mentors also provided a variety of suggestions for improvement including having the mentees submit questions beforehand, having access to the mentees biosketch before the event, increasing the time spent with each mentee, and improving overall

organization. These suggestions are reflective of factors that have been demonstrated previously to characterize effective mentoring relationships including preparation and respect for mentor's time.<sup>12</sup> Future speed-mentoring events will incorporate these suggestions to improve overall satisfaction and organization.

There are a variety of limitations that should be considered when interpreting our results. The data presented here come from a single event that took place at an academic surgical congress, in which mentoring advice and skills may differ from that given in a different environment. Although we sought to include mentors from a variety of practice backgrounds, these results may not be generalizable. Additionally, data are based on an immediate postevent survey. To truly measure the effect of the event on mentee behavior, metrics that assess behavior change would be necessary. Data presented here are based on self-reported assessment of the program. Although de-identified and anonymous, responses may be slightly skewed. Finally, our aim with this event was to determine if this was a feasible idea that would be a positive addition to the annual Clinical Congress of the ACS and not designed to assess behavior change. Based on the responses to our postevent survey, this inaugural speed-mentoring event was beneficial to both the mentors and mentees. We will use the current data to inform the design of future speed-mentoring events. This will include a more formal assessment of the program with a preevent and postevent survey as well as follow-up contact with both mentors and mentees to determine the long-term results of the mentoring session.

With these data we aim to describe a potentially new avenue for mentoring among surgical trainees. However, the long-term effect of this session remains unknown based on this study, as long-term follow-up of the participants is needed to ascertain whether true mentor-mentee relationships were forged in this interaction. We plan to survey the participants in this inaugural event as well as the second session, held in 2016, to better assess long-term outcomes. Many of the initial participating mentors were interested in repeating the experience, with 26 of 60 (43%) mentors who participated in the inaugural event returning the second year. Additionally, we were able to recruit another 66 mentors for the second event based on feedback from the inaugural event. Although the long-term outcomes remain unknown, the repeat participation is certainly a success. It is possible that these brief interactions lead to few long-term mentor-mentee relationships in the traditional sense, however, what is more exciting to us is the possibility that this program may represent a new type of mentoring with potential for expansion in the future.

Despite these limitations, our experience could provide valuable insights to other professional organizations and perhaps even large surgical departments. Whereas typically, such relationships are created arbitrarily with no choice for either mentor or mentee, this program offers an opportunity for selection. In the context of a residency program, an

incoming intern class could be offered a “speed-mentoring” session with several members of the faculty who are available to serve as mentors. We hypothesize that such a session would be perceived very favorable among residents, and may lead to more meaningful and long-lasting mentoring relationships with faculty members who have common interests.

## CONCLUSION

We demonstrated that a speed-mentoring event at a national surgical meeting offered an effective platform by which surgical trainees had the opportunity to meet with a variety of mentors. Both the mentors and mentees who participated felt that the mentees received useful advice to help guide their careers with many participants responding that they are likely to develop an ongoing mentoring relationship based on these initial interactions. Data collected from this initial event will be used to help modify and improve this event in the coming years. Future research will aim to determine the relationship between participation in a speed-mentoring session such as this and future success with regards to ability of mentees to obtain future career goals.

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