

Goals for Enhanced Mentoring in the IRP

NIH's mission is to improve the health of the public through support of biomedical research and the training of biomedical scientists. The NIH Intramural Research Program (IRP) has a long tradition of training outstanding investigators who have become leaders throughout the world. Training of fellows rests heavily on the quality of research and mentoring in individual NIH research units. Several years ago the Office of Intramural Research developed a formal guide to emphasize the training role of the NIH and encourage outstanding mentoring in its laboratories and clinics – *A GUIDE TO TRAINING AND MENTORING IN THE INTRAMURAL RESEARCH PROGRAM AT NIH*. This was developed out of a sense that research training at the NIH—and undoubtedly elsewhere—would benefit from a more explicit set of expectations for the predoctoral and postdoctoral research training experiences. This recognition, in turn, sprang from a movement by NIH fellows themselves seeking improved mentoring.

The goals of a good mentoring program are to:

- Train fellows in the methods of scientific investigation
- Train fellows in the art of oral and written communication
- Train fellows in negotiation, persuasion and diplomatic skills
- Train fellows in the legal and ethical aspects of scientific responsibility
- Work with fellows to plan their career pathways
- Ensure that fellows know how to balance their individual goals with those of their research group

One of the most important things the IRP can do for its trainees is to ensure access to, and encourage them to attend, research seminars and career development events appropriate to their stage of training. The NIH, as well as the Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) and the IC training offices, offer many seminars and programs over the course of a year and PIs should encourage their trainees to attend them. All of OITE's career development offerings can be found at <http://www.training.nih.gov/> Spending 5% of their time at such events is a reasonable commitment to the achievement of future goals.

The IRP recognizes that occasionally a trainee experiences difficulties in his/her research unit. It is important that every trainee, under such a circumstance, know where advice and help are available. The NIH places strong emphasis on good mentoring, and all Boards of Scientific Counselors, and site visit teams, are asked to review the quality of mentoring being provided by each PI. Below are several potential models for how such a review can be carried out. Many of the NIH PIs are excellent mentors and an NIH Scientific Mentoring Award is proposed as a way to recognize those mentors.

Specific proposals to ensure excellent mentoring across the IRP include:

- 1 – Ensure that both trainees and PIs know what career development resources are available and how to access them
 - link IC training websites to the OITE website and vice versa
 - establish mechanisms, such as individual development plans, for clear and timely communication of goals and expectations for the training period for both the trainee and PI
 - provide a mechanism for PIs to learn about available career development resources and ensure that PIs understand the need for their trainees to participate in workshops and seminars appropriate to their stage of training
 - enable PIs to assist their trainees in recognizing their strengths, weaknesses, and potential re future careers
 - develop guidelines to ensure that trainees are allowed to attend appropriate workshops and research seminars during the work day

- 2 – Establish mechanisms and responsible individuals for tracking mentoring quality over time, to identify and recognize superior mentoring effort as well as assist PIs who may need mentoring on how to work most effectively with trainees
 - use the BSC/site visit process as part of long-term tracking of former trainees and of mentoring performances of PIs
 - possible models for BSC review of mentoring include:
 - provision of a list of former fellows and their current positions, as well as a written description of mentoring activities in the lab
 - poster session at which BSC/site visit members meet with trainees in the absence of the PIs
 - 15-30 min meetings of a small group of trainees from one PI's lab with 1-3 BSC/site visit members
 - OITE and the NIH Fellows Committee will carry out a trans-NIH mentoring survey of all fellows every 4-5 years

- 3 – Minimize negative experiences and catch potentially serious problems quickly
 - ensure that all trainees, and PIs, are aware of NIH resources for discussing mentor-mentee and lab dynamic issues (i.e., IC Training Director, OITE staff and career counselors, Ombuds office, Employee Assistance Program)
 - within each IC, establish a plan for how problems are handled and who provides advice, and regularly publicize this information to trainees
 - within each IC, establish an IC point-of-contact for communications with OITE

- 4 – Establish an NIH IRP Scientific Mentoring Award for PIs only
 - each IC would nominate one scientist and the SD would provide suitable recognition if the IC's nominee were selected
 - OIR would select/advise on selection of one individual for the NIH IRP Scientific Mentoring Award