

‘Steer away from blind alleys’

Mentoring is a time-honoured method of learning. **Janine Brooks** explains this symbiotic relationship that can benefit mutual career objectives

Dental Mentors UK is a new web-based initiative to promote mentoring for all dental professionals living and working in the UK. By supporting dental professionals who are mentors to be the best they can be and by making it easy for those seeking a mentor, Dental Mentors UK is pushing forward excellence and accessibility of mentoring.

Who is behind Dental Mentors UK?

Dental Mentors UK was developed by two senior dental professionals: Dr Janine Brooks MBE and Dr Jane Davies-Slowik MBE. Jane and Janine are experienced dentists and both have worked in dentistry for more than 30 years. Janine says: ‘We feel very strongly that all dental professionals can benefit from working with a mentor. We also want to help improve the quality of mentoring available in dentistry. That’s why we felt it was important to include supervision for mentors and offer them continuing professional training and qualifications. By doing so, we hope to improve mentoring for those who seek it. Our own careers have been – and are – varied and we have considerable knowledge



of the breadth and depth of opportunities that dentistry can offer professionals. We both have experience in post-graduate and under-graduate dental education and are mentors and coaches.

What was the thinking behind it?

Mentoring is increasingly being seen as a way of helping and supporting the development of people and, in our case, dental professionals. In dentistry, we are beginning to appreciate the benefits of mentoring and more dental professionals have undertaken training to become mentors. The word ‘mentor’ has come to mean trusted adviser, friend, teacher and wise person.

We believe that mentors have a huge impact on you, your business and your development whatever registrant group you are. A mentor can support your

success both professionally and personally. Being a dental professional can feel quite lonely at times and it’s important to know there is someone skilled and experienced with whom you can talk and from whom you can get advice. It’s likely you will have a number of mentors throughout your career, depending on the decisions you are making and the direction of your career. Using the Dental Mentors UK profile directory, you can choose a mentor who is right for you.

Mentoring focuses on the present and on the mentee’s future, desired outcomes. The mentor supports their mentee to achieve those outcomes or goals, through a reflective, conversational process. A skilled mentor can support you to steer away from blind alleys; they can also help you unpick what is really important to you. Your mentor will be able to offer fresh insights, perhaps because they have dealt with similar situations in ➡ ⬅ the



Janine Brooks MBE is currently a coach and educator with her own consultancy, Dentalia. She is also an executive director of the Dental Coaching Academy, non-executive director of CDS CIC social enterprise, educational inspector for the GDC and lead clinical tutor for Law and Ethics BUOLD, University of Bristol. Janine was awarded a MBE for services to dentistry in 2007. Janine is also author of ‘How to develop your career in dentistry, Wiley Blackwell 2015’?

past. Importantly, a mentor can help you to foresee difficulties and work through your approach to overcome barriers and obstacles.

It is for those reasons that mentors need to be experienced members of the profession who have personal knowledge, skills and practical information they can use to support and signpost their mentee.

Dental Mentors UK has a simple purpose – to profile dental professionals who are mentors (or would like to extend their use of mentoring skills) so that those seeking a mentor can find the right person for them quickly and easily. Mentor members receive a number of free benefits – marketing and advertising, their own profile page with photo and CV, supervision with a qualified dental mentor, factsheets of tools to use to enhance mentoring and a members' forum. In addition, we provide discounted CPD and training for those who would like to study for a qualification. Mentors are free to set their own fees.

Is there anything else like it?

Janine says: 'We don't think so. Whilst there are lists of mentors held by various organisations, we don't believe there is an on-line profile directory like Dental Mentors UK. More importantly, we think we are the first to offer support to mentors, for example supervision, free factsheets, a safe forum in which they can exchange experience and ask questions and targeted continuing professional development and training. The support we offer to mentors means that mentees can have confidence that when they approach a mentor who is a member of the directory that mentor has access to quality assurance that underpins their own capability to be a better mentor. Supervision is very important and it can be difficult for mentors who do not work within an organisation to receive regular supervision.

Who can showcase their work?

All dental professionals that are also mentors and work or live in the UK. This includes all groups of dental professional registered with the General Dental Council. If a dental professional would like to become a mentor then we can offer them support in developing their skills and their business.

Do you vet those who offer themselves up as a mentor?

Potential mentors complete an application form before they are accepted for the directory. We check that they are dental professionals and the qualifications and experience they have as mentors. Formal qualifications in mentoring are at an early stage with only a small number of courses available specifically developed and tailored to dentistry. Whilst we would support and encourage dental professionals who are mentors to complete a qualification we recognise that this may take some time before it is the norm. Members CV's and profile will ensure those seeking a mentor are aware of the experience, skills and qualifications individual mentors possess. Becoming a member of Dental Mentors UK is just the beginning. Mentors also receive supervision from a qualified mentor supervisor. We provide fact sheets for mentors to help them keep up to date with tools and techniques they can offer to their mentees. In addition, we offer continuing professional development and qualifications in mentoring for members. These all help to maintain quality in mentoring.

How can dental nurses get involved?

The great news is that many dental nurses are experienced mentors. For those who would like to make mentoring part of their dental career, Dental Mentors UK is a great place to be. Members receive the benefits I mentioned above and we have a checklist and advice for those who are looking to become sole trader mentors with tips on setting up a business. For all dental professionals, including dental nurses, Dental Mentors UK has partnered with the Dental Coaching Academy and offers discounted access to qualifications in Mentoring – a level 7 postgraduate certificate specifically tailored to dental professional which is packed with practical content.

How do they choose a mentor? What is the criteria?

Choosing a mentor is very personal and rapport and trust between a mentee and their mentor is essential. Our advice would be to decide on which aspect of the profession you require a mentor to support you; for

example a particular area of dentistry, a specific career choice, remediation or personal development. Browse the on-line profile directory to find mentors who have experience in the aspect you are looking for. Each mentor has a profile page and a CV. This will tell you more about them and their experience and qualifications. It's worth remembering that qualifications in mentoring are not a requirement and many excellent mentors have not taken a specific qualification. It's also worth remembering that Dental Mentors UK provides free supervision to all its mentor members given by a qualified supervisor who is both a registered dental professional and a qualified mentor. We feel it is essential that all mentors receive supervision as part of quality assurance.

It can be helpful to create a mentoring 'contract' at the beginning of the mentoring relationship to manage expectations for both partners. This could include: the type of support and level of advice that the mentor is willing to give the mentee; the role(s) which the mentee expects the mentor to play. Confirming your objectives and goals, will include: your current role; potential and future roles; networks and relationships and professional development requirements.

The duration of the mentoring partnership will vary and can be focused on a specific goal or be more related to professional and continuing development, becoming a more on-going relationship.

Mentoring can take place through a number of different methods, for example face-to-face, telephone, or email and most mentoring relationships will utilise all these methods. Another consideration will be how often you meet with your mentor, this will depend on your needs and the objective of the mentoring. You may wish to have weekly, fortnightly or monthly conversations. It is helpful to have a mutual agreement on all of the above before the mentoring partnership begins. We would suggest negotiating a formal written agreement to reduce any misunderstanding.

When deciding on who to approach to be your mentor it's important to look for the following characteristics:

- Someone who is experienced in the aspect in which you are interested, that is; career, personal development or remediation.
- Someone with wide personal networks.
- Someone who has the time to mentor



you. However if they have too much time then perhaps they are not as active in the field and could be out of date.

- Someone you respect and trust and can develop rapport with.
- Someone who understands the role of mentor, they will have acted as a mentor before and may have a qualification or training in mentoring.

Is there guidance on the site?

Yes. Choosing a mentor is a very personal thing. Experience and qualifications are important and each mentor has a profile page and CV so that those seeking a mentor can browse. It's also important that there is good rapport between mentor and mentee and we recommend that professionals seeking a mentor contacts the person they feel best fits their needs to have an initial conversation and test for rapport.

How can a mentor support an individual professionally and personally?

The Standing Conference on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education (SCOPME) described mentoring in 1998 as:

'The process whereby an experienced, highly regarded, empathic person (the mentor), guides another individual (the mentee) in the development and

re-examination of their own ideas, learning, and personal and professional development. The mentor who often, but not necessarily, works in the same organisation or field as the mentee, achieves this by listening and talking in confidence to the mentee.'

Mentoring can be as broad or as deep as you want it to be. It is led by you (the person seeking mentoring) and whether the focus is for personal development or career development or remediation, mentoring is invaluable. Mentoring for career development can help you discover career opportunities you did not know existed and it can help you explore those you are interested in in more depth.

The General Dental Council recognises the importance of mentoring in the remediation process and many fitness to practice determinations include a requirement for the registrant to work with a mentor. This particular aspect of mentoring is usually very rewarding. Many professionals struggle at times in their career and to support a colleague at that time is a privilege.

How do you select a mentor from the site?

It's very easy to browse the profiles and CV's of dental mentors featured by the directory, simply click on the directory button on the

home page and scroll through the featured mentors. Click on any mentor to read their profile and their CV including how to contact them. Contact your chosen mentor by email or telephone and off you go. Mentors who feature in the directory will charge a fee (usually by the hour) for the mentoring they provide, as they are free to set their own fees, this will be a question to ask before committing to a mentoring relationship.

Dental Mentors UK is the site for all dental professionals. The online profile directory brings together mentors and mentees from all dental professions living and working in the UK. Dental Mentors UK is **THE** profile directory for all dental mentors to showcase their skills and **THE** place for all dental professionals to find the right mentor for them. Dental professionals looking for a mentor can browse the directory to find the right mentor for them at no cost.

You can find Dental Mentors UK at **www.dentalmentorsuk.com**. Come and join us today.

References

1. Brooks, J.A. (2015) How to develop your career in dentistry, Wiley Blackwell.
2. Standing Committee on Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education (1998) Supporting Doctors and Dentists at Work. An Enquiry into Mentoring. SCOPME.