

## COLLEGE OF PHARMACY PRACTICE

# Who needs a mentor?

*At a time of great change for pharmacy, do all pharmacists need mentors? Mentoring was the subject of a meeting held by the College of Pharmacy Practice in London on 8 May. Clare Bellingham reports*

**M**entoring is “a process where one person offers help, guidance, advice and support to facilitate the learning of another person”, said AILEEN CORY, NHS leadership development manager, Bristol. She explained that some of the roles of a mentor are to:

- Provide support and listen
- Provide constructive feedback
- Help to release potential
- Give access to a wider network
- Provide practical advice
- Provide access to information
- Build confidence
- Challenge thinking and give a broader perspective
- Provide counselling on personal matters
- Give support during a formal academic development programme

These roles could be provided on an informal or formal basis, and by individuals or groups of people.

The mentoring process starts by creating a relationship and establishing trust, followed by a diagnostic stage (what needs to happen), progression (working on the issues, intense period) and maturation. The relationship might come to a natural close at the end of this phase and the person being “mentored” might choose to move on to another mentor. However, some relationships move on together and in these cases mentoring partnerships could go on for years. “Someone might have several mentors within their professional life,” she said. However, she believed that line managers could not act as mentors. “They have a different role to play,” she said.

## MENTORING IN PRACTICE

LloydsPharmacy introduced a mentoring scheme following requests from people for help through its performance review process, explained STEVE HOWARD, director of training and development at the company. The scheme began in January 2001 and involved 90 people from across the business — both within LloydsPharmacy and also from AAH.

He highlighted that support within the scheme was important. “We looked at other mentoring schemes before introducing ours and found that most collapsed within two years. That was why we put support in place.” Initially this had involved a document and workshops about how mentoring works. A mentoring database was also set up. The database runs on a shared server that any member of staff could access.

“People volunteered to be mentors, we had no difficulty in finding people who

wanted to volunteer,” he said. Their details were then fed into the database with information about their career history and areas of ability. People could then search the list to find a mentor according to their needs. “It was up to the individual to identify the correct mentor for them.” No mentor could support more than two people.

Mr Howard’s people had had different mentoring needs. The first was specific about what she wanted and this had resulted in an intense relationship which lasted for six months when she had achieved all the goals she had set. The other person wanted a much longer relationship and Mr Howard remains his mentor.

Mentors felt that the process gave them a sense of personal satisfaction, of being able “to put something back”. It also allowed the company to identify high flyers and people who had excellent coaching skills. Meanwhile, “mentees” received benefits including career enhancement and training in organisation politics. However, there were difficulties too. Mentors were frustrated when a mentee was not progressing. Addressing conflicts, such as being aware of or involved in discussions that could affect the mentee, was also hard.

One of the key learning was that “mentoring schemes have to be managed but not overly so”. The scheme had involved too much paperwork and had been over-managed at the beginning. Much of the paperwork and database were no longer being used. However he said the initial training was successful. “The boundaries of the relationships need to be clearly defined but it has to be driven by the two people within the relationship.”

The mentoring scheme at Lloyds continues — albeit in a less managed form. Mr Howard added that many more informal mentoring relationships have developed too and that these can be as effective as the formal relationships created through the scheme. In addition, the company plans to launch an “adopt a pharmacist” scheme soon. This will be a way of getting people at head office and pharmacists in branches together to increase understanding of how each other works. He hopes in the future that mentoring relationships could be extended outside the organisation to other community pharmacists and people in the NHS.

JENNIFER ARCHER, assistant director of the Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education, explained that the difference between a coach and a mentor is that coaching involves practical demonstration and teaching, whereas mentoring involves enabling and facilitating development.

She advocated use of a mentoring contract. It allows boundaries to be agreed

before the start so both parties know what is expected of them. It also helps to avoid misunderstandings and focuses people on the process, she added. A mentoring contract people should agree how often meetings should happen. She suggested that once every six weeks seemed to be an average. Before the first meeting, the mentee should think about why they want a mentor and what their goals are. A good approach for the first meeting is then drawing a time line with goals.

Ms Archer encouraged pharmacists to think about being “mentored” by someone outside their organisation, or outside pharmacy. Other professions such as doctors or nurses are possibilities.

Support mechanisms are important. “A good mentor will know when to stop and when to involve someone else in the process; they cannot do everything,” she commented.

## COLLEGE ROLE

IAN SIMPSON, chief executive of the College of Pharmacy Practice, said that the College believes mentoring is a key part of education and training.

“The CPP governors decided that mentoring is a useful contribution the College can make to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society’s continuing professional development programme,” he said. Discussions with the Society’s education division have been positive and the division has indicated that the Society would welcome such an initiative, he reported.

The College first produced a publication on mentoring in 1995 which is currently being revised. Mentoring is used as part of the process by which people can gain membership of the College through practice.

The College has found it difficult to get people to act as mentors in the past. It is a voluntary activity with a lack of training. So it aims to tackle these problems in a number of ways. First, mentoring will be promoted as part of CPD for members. Training will be offered to mentors and a framework in which mentoring can operate will be established. The College will also offer payment to people acting as mentors and aims to establish a network of mentors throughout the UK.

Mentoring is not a new phenomenon. All the speakers pointed out its origin in Greek mythology: Mentor was the name of the trusted friend with whom Odysseus left his son Telemachus when he went to fight the Trojan wars. But it is also something needed now. ANGELA ALEXANDER, chairman of governors, CPP, concluded: “At this time of change, we need an informal support mechanism to provide the encouragement we need to keep going.”