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A Call for Sponsoring Physician-Scientist Trainees in Health Professions Education

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Published in:
Academic Medicine

DOI:
[10.1097/ACM.0000000000005706](https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000005706)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2024

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Galema, G., & Meeuwissen, S. N. E. (2024). A Call for Sponsoring Physician-Scientist Trainees in Health Professions Education. *Academic Medicine*, 99(6), E12. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000005706>

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A Call for Sponsoring Physician-Scientist Trainees in Health Professions Education

To the Editor: Mentorship refers to the process of advising on professional development, while sponsorship goes a step further and involves advocating for and creating opportunities for high-potential, early-career trainees.¹ As two physician-scientist trainees attempting to combine residency training with a research career in health professions education (HPE), we have often felt confused about our developing professional identities. We feel that we belong to a landscape of practice² in which we are oscillating between the community of practice of clinicians and that of HPE researchers. As a result, we often struggle to figure out who would be our ideal mentors and sponsors, and how they could help.

Even though our clinical mentors advise us on the clinical part of our career, and research mentors advise on the research part of our career, being able to combine them has been difficult and lonely to figure out. Oftentimes these two parts do not align, and we must navigate the boundaries of the different parts and communities on our own. We have been lucky that we found mentors and sponsors who have facilitated our careers so far, and we are grateful, but this did not come easily.

We call on the HPE community to reflect on and consider whether they value the integrated identity of physician-scientist

trainees and whether they could sponsor someone similar. We would love for senior leaders in HPE to sponsor physician-scientist trainees and create a meaningful journey together.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank Anique Atherley, PhD, for her guidance throughout this writing process.

Funding/Support: None reported.

Other disclosures: None reported.

Ethical approval: Reported as not applicable.

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First published online March 15, 2024

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Seeking Similar Mentors: A Remedy for Imposter Syndrome in Those Underrepresented in Medicine

To the Editor: Individuals often feel like imposters when there are few people around them who share a similar ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Individuals underrepresented in medicine are at particularly high risk for imposter syndrome, or feeling undeserving, inferior, and mediocre, despite their demonstrated achievement and talent.¹

I am one of those individuals. I am a first-generation Mexican American from a broken, low-income household. Despite having a 4.0 grade point average, 83rd percentile Medical College Admission Test score, research involvement, jobs while in school, hundreds of volunteer hours, and multiple leadership positions, I felt inadequate to apply to medical school—until I met Dr. X. He was the first

physician I encountered in whom I saw a true resemblance of myself.

We met while collaborating to provide COVID-19 vaccines to medically marginalized Hispanic/Latinx individuals. I was the vaccine coordinator for the free clinic where he served as medical director. As we bonded every week providing vaccines beneath the scorching Phoenix, Arizona, sun, he generously shared his life experiences and his road to medicine. In addition to inspiring me to pursue medicine, he was an invaluable mentor who made me feel like I belonged in medicine by sponsoring me for organizations, such as VacunateYa and the National Hispanic Medical Association, and introducing me to other health care professionals with similar identities. He also ameliorated my self-doubt by believing in me in moments when I did not believe in myself, and unconditionally advocating for me. He wrote me several letters of recommendation for medical school and scholarship opportunities, and even connected me with the dean of admissions at a medical school. He helped me realize my greatness. In virtue of his encouragement, I applied to medical school and received admission into half of the programs to which I applied.

Dr. X's profound impact on me and my educational journey is a testament that individuals require others who look like them and share similar lived experiences to feel a true sense of belonging. In order to begin to dismantle the detrimental effect of imposter syndrome on students and future physicians like me, it is imperative to increase the diversity of medical education institutions.

Editor's note: Identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individual(s) described.

Acknowledgments: This letter is a tribute to Dr. Ricardo Correa. The author thanks him from the bottom of his heart and cannot wait to pay it forward. The author also thanks Drs. Rory Merritt and Roxanne Vrees for their exceptional editorial assistance.

Funding/Support: None reported.

Other disclosures: None reported.

Ethical approval: Reported as not applicable.

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First published online November 14, 2023