What is mentoring?

Mentoring is the pairing of two people – a mentor and a mentee – to facilitate the sharing of professional skills and experiences, as well as enhancing career development. It provides a structured and trusting relationship by bringing less experienced veterinarians together with more experienced members of the profession, normally working in a similar field, who can offer guidance.

Mentoring is founded on the use of encouragement, constructive comments, openness, mutual trust, respect and a willingness to learn and share.

Mentoring can be provided in a range of ways and is generally agreed on by the mentor and mentee. Some mentors and mentees formalize their pairing with a written agreement and others choose a less official approach.

Mentoring is a powerful personal development and confidence building tool. It’s an effective way of helping people progress in their careers.

CVMA recommends a 12 month mentoring commitment between an established professional and someone who is new to the veterinary profession.

Mentoring Program Guide

“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own.” —Benjamin Disraeli
The CVMA Mentoring Program aims to facilitate connections among members that will provide support to recent graduates as they transition to professional life, and to early-career veterinarians who may be looking to make a major career change within veterinary medicine.

**Benefits for the mentee**

For mentees, mentoring provides an expansion of their knowledge, skills and confidence. They gain the opportunity to discuss their goals, concerns and challenges with a trusted advisor who will provide non-judgemental advice, constructive feedback, as well as ongoing support and encouragement.

**Benefits for the mentor**

For mentors, mentoring provides the opportunity to reflect on his or her skills and practices. Mentoring also exposes the mentor to new ideas and opportunities to further develop their communication and leadership skills. Finally, there is a personal satisfaction in professional nurturing and sharing one’s knowledge and expertise.

Ideally, mentors would have experienced situations similar to those faced by mentees. Their role is to help their mentee settle into veterinary professional life with practical help and guidance.

A mentor should help the mentee trust themselves and boost their confidence. A mentor should ask questions and challenge their mentee, while providing guidance and encouragement.

A mentor is a guide who can help the mentee refine the direction they might like to take in their career and who can help them to develop solutions to career issues.
Often mentors are characterized as being older and more worldly-wise than their mentees. However, while one partner may have more experience than the other in some areas, age and status are not necessarily relevant to the value one brings to the mentoring partnership. The CVMA encourages younger veterinarians to join the Mentoring Program because of the relevant experience they have.

A mentor may:

- support the transition into veterinary life
- act as a source of information and insight
- suggest relevant options regarding career development or strategies for achieving professional goals
- recognize when a mentee may need professional help to address mental health or other personal or professional issues
- be able to recommend appropriate professional help to address these issues
- recommend possible and practical resources to improve specific skills
- help the mentee solve professional challenges in their working life
- discuss issues of professional ethics
- discuss workplace related problems and options for how these may be addressed, e.g., pay and conditions and interpersonal relationships
- provide advice on options for dealing with difficult client relationships.

A mentor is a person who will listen, give information, advice and counsel when requested.

Some of the skills required to be a mentor include:

- a genuine desire to help mentees transition smoothly into professional life
- an ability to negotiate time commitments and accessibility
- being able to identify the mentee’s needs and goals and how to facilitate, support and encourage them to achieve those goals
- an ability to actively listen
- honesty and openness in providing non-judgemental feedback and advice
- knowledge of a range of problem solving approaches
- maintaining a professional relationship
- an understanding of different mentoring styles.
What mentoring isn’t:

- one person dominating, directing or controlling another’s decisions
- one person becoming dependant or reliant on someone else
- using or taking unfair advantage of someone
- giving favours that are expected to be returned or paid back
- making best friends. While friendship may develop, it’s not the primary goal of the relationship.

Expectations of the program

To participate in the program as a mentor you’ll need to:

- be a CVMA member. A member whose licence to practice in a province has been suspended or revoked, or who is involved in a proceeding with any veterinary regulatory body at the time of application as a mentor, is not eligible to register as a mentor until their licensure status has been returned to good standing by the relevant veterinary regulatory body.
- agree to complete a mentor profile form and be listed in the online pool of prospective mentors
- be prepared to commit for a 12-month period
- make regular contact with your mentee (forms of interaction can be discussed between the mentor and mentee, e.g., face-to-face, email or Skype)
- Even if you don’t get many responses, it’s your role to keep in contact with your mentee for the 12 months (unless they request otherwise). Often they like to receive the email even though they may not respond.
- Remember that you’re not an expert in everything, so refer on or ask questions when you’re not sure what advice is adequate and relevant to mentees.

To participate in the program as a mentee you’ll need to:

- be a CVMA member
- agree to complete a mentee profile form (for CVMA administrative purposes only)
- be prepared to commit for a 12-month period
- initiate the search and selection of your mentor and make the initial contact
- maintain regular contact with your mentor (forms of interaction can be discussed between the mentor and mentee, e.g., face-to-face, email or Skype)
- identify the skills and competencies you wish to gain.
Mentors and mentees have shared obligations. They should:

- be enthusiastic, optimistic, sensitive, considerate and respectful to each other
- make a time commitment to the relationship
- be open to new concepts and feedback
- maintain a professional relationship, including the confidentiality of any discussions
- reschedule any postponed meetings
- schedule time to assess and celebrate progress
- evaluate the mentoring relationship to see if it should continue, be modified or terminated.

The mentor should:

- help the mentee identify the goals they want to achieve
- be willing to acknowledge a mentee may not necessarily ask for the help or advice they would like to give
- aim to learn and practice giving constructive feedback
- help the mentee with the professional decision-making process, if needed
- help the mentee become fully independent as a professional, recognizing that the mentee has ultimate responsibility for their personal and professional decisions
- encourage self-directed learning by the mentee
Mentoring agreement

A mentoring relationship can be very varied depending on the needs and wants of the mentee and mentor. It can be formal or informal, virtual or face-to-face. It can be based on a written or verbal agreement.

If you decide to take a formal approach, here are some items to include in a mentoring agreement:

- confidentiality
- conflict of interest disclosure
- formal agreement on roles and responsibilities
- projected meetings (check-in) schedule – including time and frequency
- forms of interaction, e.g., face-to-face, email or Skype (this can be discussed between the mentor and mentee)
- goal plan, which may be broken down into an action plan
- mutual decision to end the formal relationship based on agreed upon criteria.

An outline of a Mentoring Relationship Agreement is appended to this document.

The mentee should:

- own the relationship. They should discuss and prioritize their professional needs and goals
- request help in clarifying goals, finding resources and identifying directions for their career
- respect the mentor’s time by identifying, planning and preparing issues for discussion
- recognize that learning client communication and clinical skills takes time and practice
- not expect the mentor to be an expert on everything
- be willing to share their fears, challenges and concerns
- be open to seeking professional assistance
- aim to be an open and active listener, and understand constructive feedback is vital to continuous professional growth.
Some issues to consider

Confidentiality
During discussions between mentor and mentee, it’s inevitable that matters of client confidentiality will be an issue when clinical material is presented. Furthermore, there are likely to be matters of veterinary business arising when workplace issues are discussed. Other issues might also arise where sensitive matters are aired.
Both mentor and mentee must be aware of the likely confidential nature of their interactions and be careful not to disclose anything that would breach personal, professional or client confidentiality.

What if a relationship isn’t working?
As with all human relationships, some mentoring interaction will work well, some will be okay and others will not work at all to the satisfaction of both parties.
When the mentoring relationship is not working for whatever reason, it’s important that the issues are addressed promptly and a mutually agreeable solution found as soon as possible. If a solution cannot be found, the mentee and the mentor have the right to terminate the mentoring relationship.
By allowing for the relationship to come to closure with integrity and respect, you are respecting each other’s time and potentially freeing up the mentor so that someone else can benefit from a mentorship with them, and letting the mentee seek another mentor if needed.

When should I refer my mentee to another professional?
As a mentor you may be challenged by some questions on issues you are unable to completely resolve for your mentee. For those experiencing work-related anxiety, visit the Veterinarians Health and Wellness section of the CVMA website (http://www.canadianveterinarians.net/practice-economics/vet-health-wellness). The information, tools and resources are intended to support the better mental health and wellness of veterinarians.
Appendix – Sample Mentoring Relationship Agreement

A successful mentoring relationship starts with a shared understanding of the commitment and a shared responsibility for ensuring that it is beneficial to both parties. By clearly identifying the goals and expectations, a written agreement will provide the framework for the scope of your relationship.

Mentor name: ________________________________

Mentee name: ________________________________

Our agreed goals for this mentoring relationship are:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Our expectations for how we will achieve these goals are:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Meeting (check-in) schedule (frequency and duration) and other methods of communication:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

How we will record and monitor our progress:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Confidentiality

We agree to keep confidential everything that is said within the mentoring relationship.

Note here any conflicts of interest which may impact on this relationship:

Mentee signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Mentor signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

This is an informal agreement and is not legally binding. Mentee to keep original with copy to mentor.
The CVMA Mentoring Program Guide is adapted with permission from the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) Mentor Program Guide and from the American Animal Hospital Association Mentoring Guidelines, American Animal Hospital Association (May/June 2008).