Mentorship, the opportunity to learn from a wise adviser, scholar, and expert, is all too often overlooked as an important role-development strategy for nurse practitioners (NPs). Frequently, nurses who graduate from Master's Degree Programs find themselves in leadership positions with little guidance from others who are more experienced in the role. Although NPs are looked on as the clinical experts to turn to for guidance and support, the NP likewise needs individuals who can nurture and support the role in an effective learning environment.

The definitions of mentors are varied and reflect the diversity of the mentoring relationship. Taylor (1992) discussed a mentor as one who takes a personal interest in assisting someone to develop the knowledge and skills needed to meet specific career goals. Characteristics of positive mentoring relationships include valuing the person and believing in the individual's potential for success. The mentor can be a role model, guide, teacher, coach, or confidant. Personal qualities of mentors have been described in the literature. Taylor (1992) discussed three important characteristics of mentors that were essential for building positive relationships: integrity, professional values, and trustworthiness.

The literature promotes the importance of the mentor's role of scholar; however, this role is often misleading. In the book, *The Tao of Pooh*, by Benjamin Hoff (1982), a scholar is described as "one who studies Knowledge for the sake of Knowledge, and who keeps what he learns to himself or to his own small group, writing pompous and pretentious papers that no one else can understand, rather than working for the enlightenment of others" (Hoff, 1982, p. 26). This similar concept of scholar, perceived by many NPs, often creates the picture of an unapproachable individual who is not interested in nurturing anyone. This misconception prevents the less experienced NP from approaching individuals who may be able to provide a great deal of assistance as a role model. Several researchers have found that a nurturing relationship between a teacher or scholar and the student provides the opportunity for both professional and personal growth. White (1988), in a study evaluating 300 academic nurse administrators, found that mentors gave these individuals confidence and inspiration and encouraged achievement and intellectual development. Spengler (1982), evaluating 501 mentored PhD-prepared nurses, found them to have more definite career plans, to be more satisfied with their career progression, and to possess a greater sense of accomplishment. Hamilton et al. (1988), in a study evaluating mentoring and new graduate nurses, found that new nurses with mentors had increased job satisfaction and leadership behaviors.

Mentoring relationships, when used effectively, provide a learning environment that nurtures the NP role while strengthening technical skills. Characteristics of an effective mentoring environment involve (a) providing leadership, (b) showing patience, (c) demonstrating caring, and (d) maintaining loyalty. Building trust in the relationship is an essential component for creating a nurturing environment for less experienced nurses. The mentorship process provides a mechanism for learning by socialization. The mentor helps the less experienced nurse learn the requirements of the role. In the book, *The Tao of Pooh* (Hoff, 1982), Pooh is described as the most effortless bear we have ever seen. When Winnie the Pooh is asked how he gets everything done, he says, "They just sort of happen..." (Hoff, 1982, p. 70). The socialization process in a mentoring relation-
ship should be perceived by the learner as an effortless process. The effective mentor creates such a learning environment, where socialization of the role evolves smoothly over time. This is not to imply that it does not take a great deal of work and motivation to develop an advanced practice role but emphasizes the strength of the mentoring relationship in creating a role model that is easily adapted. Within the learning environment, knowledge is imparted by “observing” as well as “doing.” Mentors who are confident in their own abilities will allow the student to develop expertise in a non-threatening, interactive, nurturing environment in which to grow as a professional. In a true mentoring relationship, the skills and qualities that need to be socialized into the role are learned by observing, participating, and evaluating. So how does the less experienced advanced practice nurse find someone so scholarly, nurturing, and dedicated to serve as a mentor?

A mentoring relationship must be developed over time and requires commitment from both sides. Numerous opportunities exist. Mentoring relationships can develop within one’s own institution or community, by networking with other NPs throughout the country, and through associations with Graduate Schools of Nursing. Nurses seeking mentors within their community or institution should begin by increasing their awareness of other advanced practice nurses. For example, does a joint forum exist where NPs, clinical nurse specialists, and other advanced practice nurses meet to discuss common concerns and interests? Frequently the most satisfying mentoring relationships develop from collaborative efforts between two advanced practice nurses. A great deal of knowledge can be imparted when one begins to share expertise with another individual. It is important to remember that physicians can serve as excellent mentors for NPs. Many times a great deal of insight can be gained regarding an individual’s professional practice when members of other disciplines are used as role models.

Another opportunity for the development of mentoring relationships is through national networking with other NPs. Advanced practice nurses can utilize experts in their area of interest throughout the country. Joining national organizations provides the NP with opportunities to meet other individuals at meetings and conferences. Involvement on committees in collaborative projects and in special interest groups offers an opportunity to develop supportive, nurturing relationships.

Relationships with Graduate Schools of Nursing can lend support to individuals in new NP roles. Faculty members are often able to provide guidance and support for professional development related to research and publication. Collaborative research relationships blend the NP’s clinical expertise with the faculty member’s research experience.

Finding someone who is willing to listen to one’s ideas and vision can serve as great motivation. Listening is an important quality often lacking in the advanced practice environment. Winnie the Pooh, when asked one day what he was doing, simply stated, “Listening” (Hoff, 1982, p. 101). His friend asked what he was listening to and Pooh described the birds and the squirrel who were telling him that it was a nice day. His friend stated, “But you know that already.” Pooh replied, “Yes, but it is always good to hear that somebody else thinks so too” (Hoff, 1982, p. 101). For the mentoring relationship, that is what listening is all about, having someone else support your work while listening to your dreams and vision.

True mentorship relationships can augment the “imprinting” of positive NP experiences and are powerful tools to provide nurses with a “role model” to pattern behavior. Perhaps mentorship is the forgotten art of teaching.

REFERENCES


