THE GIFT OF MENTORSHIP

Recently, I was reflecting on how blessed I have been. I am a man of humble beginnings who grew up in Flandreau, South Dakota. My father served our small rural community as a minister, and my mother was a piano teacher. Both instilled in me the value of hard work, lifelong learning, and caring for others. Through my early life experiences, I developed a genuine love of people as well as an intense desire to make my life count.

As a high school student, working as an orderly in the local nursing home exposed me to patient care and planted the seeds of my future career. While I was at the University of Minnesota Medical School in Minneapolis, corneal subspecialist J. Daniel Nelson, my advisor and friend, showed me how rewarding a career in ophthalmology could be. The opportunity to work in the laboratory of Edward J. Holland, MD, contributed to my decision to pursue a career in ophthalmology as well.

At Northwestern University in Chicago, renowned glaucoma surgeons Lisa Rosenberg, Jon Ruderman, and Theodore Krupin profoundly and positively influenced the direction of my professional career. At the start of my residency in the late 1990s, I never even considered completing a glaucoma fellowship. I was swayed by their expert guidance and the rapid evolution of glaucoma care with the advent of topical prostaglandin analogues, carbonic anhydrase inhibitors, and α-agonists as well as the use of mitomycin C and 5-fluorouracil in filtration surgery.

A true visionary, the late Dr. Krupin inspired me to think outside the box and to consider how we could advance our field. His development of the first tube shunt with a slit valve and his work in the area of low-tension glaucoma were major contributions to the glaucoma subspecialty.

Dr. Rosenberg spent long hours with me after clinic teaching me advanced suturing techniques and facilitating my growth as both a clinician and a surgeon. I am certain that I never would have pursued a career in glaucoma without her tutelage and support. Dr. Ruderman is a true renaissance man whose devotion to his patients and family inspires me even today.

Their willingness to consider me as a glaucoma fellowship applicant late in the process changed the course of my life for the better. I will never be able to adequately repay them for their investment in me. Because of these outstanding individuals, I have enjoyed opportunities that have exceeded my wildest dreams.

Looking back, I see that numerous individuals conferred on me one of the greatest gifts—mentorship. I firmly believe our glaucoma community is filled with a disproportionately high number of people of exceptional character. Glaucomatologists are intellectual, bright, caring, and committed to enhancing patients’ quality of life. I hope that the culture of mentorship I have experienced continues to be a mainstay of our profession.

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Steven D. Vold, MD
Chief Medical Editor