

Establishing effective relationships with role models and peers

Developing a career in biomedical science requires you to become very proactive about seeking out your own sources of advice, guidance and support.

At various points in your career you may find the advice of different colleagues more relevant and useful. It may also be useful to draw on more than one person or group for support.

Below are some of the people from your professional network whom you might consider consulting.

1 Senior colleagues in your department or university can often provide informal support and guidance on particular issues that you are dealing with. They may be especially useful for thinking about making big career decisions, such as preparing to apply for fellowships and grants.

When seeking advice from a senior colleague, it is important to be clear in your mind about what you are looking for and why you are choosing a particular individual. It may seem obvious to choose the most successful person in your field but status and career success in itself does not necessarily mean that person will give you good advice. It is more important to choose someone with whom you have a rapport, listens well, is interested and willing to give you advice and is able to give some time to you on a regular basis.

In making an initial approach it is helpful to be able to talk about what you need from the relationship, how often you might want to meet and your understanding of confidentiality. You may only want guidance on a one-off basis or you might be looking for support in the long term. It is important to clarify that with your colleague and come to an agreement to move forward.

Don't be afraid to ask for a meeting with a senior colleague. Most will be happy to give their time to help you and if they are too busy you haven't lost anything.

2 Peers can offer a unique perspective and can sympathise with your problems and concerns because they are likely to be dealing with similar issues. Peer mentoring groups are normally made up of 3-6 colleagues, at similar career stages, meeting regularly to offer and

receive mentoring support from each other. To be effective, participants need to be willing to provide confidential, informal advice and feedback. It is also important to establish how often it is useful to meet, where meetings will take place and what the limits and boundaries of the relationships are.

In choosing peers for your mentoring group, it is equally important to decide whether people who are separate from your day-to-day work and who can therefore give you unbiased support and advice are more useful or whether you will benefit from the sympathetic ear of a colleague who knows about your university or department. You may find it useful to use the Academy's networking events and meetings to identify potential peer mentors.

3 Your personal network of colleagues and peers, especially if wide and varied, may be useful in helping you make big career changes and develop collaborative projects. Effective networks take time to develop and close relationships need to be cultivated proactively.

The conferences and meetings that you attend are excellent opportunities to develop networks that will serve you well in the future. Follow-up with new contacts after an initial connection is key to solidifying the relationship. LinkedIn is a great tool for keeping track of your contacts and keeping up to date as they progress in their careers.

Networking isn't just about meeting people who are useful for your career. If you approach networking with an eye on how you can be helpful to others they will be more likely to build a lasting relationship with you.