

Guiding the Next Generation: The Vital Role of Mentorship in Aerospace Medicine

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What role has mentorship played in your life and career? Who were your mentors? And what steps have you taken to act as mentors to others during your career? Mentorship is an important part of your career in aerospace medicine, yet in many cases mentorship happens without our realizing it until later. When I started thinking about this as the theme of my first President's Page for the June 2024 issue of the Blue Journal, I realized that my first aerospace mentor was my father, who was a pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force. In addition to exposing me to the aviation environment from an early age, he ingrained in me values of honesty, hard work, and excellence. I became aware of space in 1957 when Sputnik caught the world's attention with its beeping radio signal, and subsequently with the advent of human spaceflight in the early 1960s. Dr. Chuck Berry, physician to the NASA astronauts, was an early hero of mine, and while I did not know him personally until much later, helped shape my career.

During medical school I focused on aerospace medicine as my career objective, with electives at NASA Ames Research Center in California, the Lovelace Clinic in New Mexico where Dr. Richard (Dick) Masters became an early mentor, and the School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks AFB, TX, where I first met Dr. Russ Rayman, later AsMA Executive Director, when he was a Resident in Aerospace Medicine (RAM). For residency training I chose Mayo Clinic because of its importance as an aerospace

medicine research center during World War 2 and its relationship with Northwest Airlines, for which Dr. Earl Carter served as Medical Director. Earl and, subsequently, Dr. John Hodgson profoundly influenced my interest in airline medicine, to which I would return later. First, though, I wanted to better understand aircraft manufacture and settled on the University of Washington for a residency in preventive medicine, spending most Wednesday afternoons that year at Boeing Field in south Seattle with Dr. Barry Dunphy, Medical Director of Boeing. I learned a lot from my mentors and will be forever grateful to them.

Aerospace medicine requires an understanding not only of medicine, but also of the unique challenges posed by environmental, physiological, and human factors in aviation and space. Mentors can offer wisdom and experience that textbooks alone cannot provide, and can provide guidance and encouragement on professional opportunities, networking, and career strategies throughout your career. Give some thought to how mentors have influenced your own participation in aerospace medicine and AsMA. By doing so, you will recognize their importance in your career and, through their example, how you might help others. Mentors contribute to the advancement of our field, ensuring that our specialty will continue to evolve. They encourage research, innovation, and the pursuit and presentation of new knowledge in aviation and space medicine.

To find or to be a mentor you should be a member of an organization such as the Aerospace Medical Association, the International Academy of Aviation and Space Medicine, or the many Constituent and Affiliated Organizations, including National Medical Associations, worldwide. Whatever your interest in aviation and space medicine, you will find like-minded professionals to engage your interest and to help you reach your career goals. I would encourage you to also make your work and your interests known by presenting research papers and participating on panels as well as learning about and attending those meetings of AsMA's 18 Standing Committees which align with your career interests. It is there that you will often develop close personal connections with others who can help guide your career as well as bringing new and innovative ideas into the discussion. As aerospace medicine continues to be integral to human performance in aviation and space, the role of mentorship is essential. All the best for a successful career and may the force of mentorship be with you!

AsMA is a family. No one belongs there more than you!



Dr. Orford, right, is sitting with Dr. Charles Berry, center. On the left is Dale Orford.

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