

## A guide for medical students and trainees to find virtual mentorship in the COVID era and beyond



*To the Editor:* Mentorship is critically important in medical careers and can shape the future trajectory for medical students in particular. However, access to mentorship may be limited for several important groups. In a survey of fourth-year medical students at one institution, students pursuing non—primary care specialties and women felt they did not receive adequate mentorship.<sup>1</sup> Mentorship has traditionally been conducted face to face and is often limited geographically to students' medical schools, putting students in certain regions and those without a home dermatology program at a disadvantage. A publication describing the perspectives of 4 medical students who matched in dermatology highlighted mentorship as one of the most crucial factors to successfully match.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we must build upon the opportunity during COVID-19 to expand virtual mentorship to improve access to mentorship in dermatology. We describe current challenges faced by medical students and provide recommendations to increase mentorship in the future.

Despite the documented importance of mentorship in pursuing and successfully matching into dermatology, minority medical students report that limited access to mentorship is a major barrier to applying for dermatology residency.<sup>3</sup> Connecting with mentors of minority demographics can pose a challenge given that as of 2018, less than 6% of dermatology faculty at United States medical schools identified as Black (0.5% male and 2.2% female) or Latino (1.4% male and 1.4% female).<sup>4</sup> Access to mentorship may be particularly limited for students without a home program or those seeking mentorship from either of these minority groups. Virtual mentorship may serve to expand and diversify the workforce in academic dermatology. Additionally, having multiple mentors and “establishing a mentorship team” has been recognized as a way to identify and reduce “mentorship malpractice” where mentees are misguided or taken advantage of, further highlighting the need for increased access to mentorship.<sup>5</sup>

Structured mentorship programs are fewer and harder to come by for medical students when compared with opportunities for residents and

faculty who interact daily with established dermatologists and potential mentors (Table 1). We believe that more focus should be placed on creating mentorship opportunities for medical students and have outlined suggestions for making this possible (Fig 1).

Although the benefits of virtual mentorship are numerous, downsides to this approach deserve consideration. The close nature of some mentoring relationships may take longer to mature in a virtual setting, and it may be more difficult to find a good fit because the relationship does not develop as organically as it would in person. Additionally, coordination of schedules to accommodate time zone differences and schedules may be challenging.

Even when we are able to put the COVID-19 pandemic behind us, we can continue to utilize a blend of in-person and virtual modalities to foster mentorship within the field of dermatology. The goal of these modalities is to include all backgrounds and ensure mentorship availability for those who would otherwise be unable to engage, such as those without the institutional support or financial means or those with family obligations.

*Jennifer M. Fernandez, BS, RD,<sup>a</sup> Sara Bebbabani, MS,<sup>b</sup> and Amanda F. Marsch, MD<sup>c</sup>*

*From the University of Arizona, College of Medicine; Tucson, Arizona<sup>a</sup>; Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Newark New Jersey<sup>b</sup>; and the Department of Dermatology, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, California.<sup>c</sup>*

*Jennifer M. Fernandez and Sara Bebbabani contributed equally to this article.*

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*Correspondence to: Amanda F. Marsch, MD, Assistant Professor of Dermatology, UC San Diego Health – University Center Lane, La Jolla, 8899 University Center Lane, La Jolla, CA 92122*

*E-mail: [amarsch@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:amarsch@health.ucsd.edu)*

### Conflicts of interest

None disclosed.

**Table I.** Mentorship opportunities in dermatology in 2020

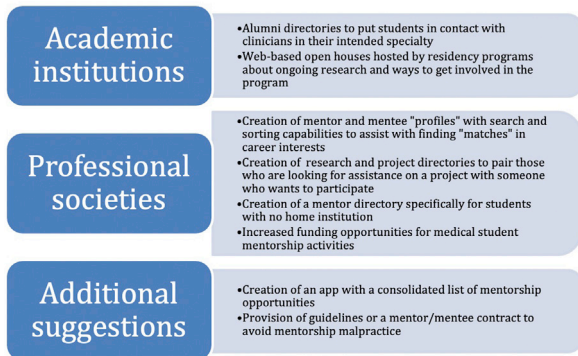
Mentorship opportunity	Website	Students	Residents	Fellows	Junior faculty	Membership required for mentee?	Format (in person vs virtual)*	Time commitment	Funding available?	Funding amount (USD)
AAD Academic Dermatology Leadership Program	<a href="https://www.aad.org/member/career/li/academic">https://www.aad.org/member/career/li/academic</a>				✓	Yes	Both	1 yr	Yes	Covers cost of workshops and travel
AAD Diversity Mentorship Program	<a href="https://www.aad.org/member/career/awards/diversity#undefined">https://www.aad.org/member/career/awards/diversity#undefined</a>	✓				No	Both	4 wk	Yes	Up to \$1500
AAD Mentorship Program	<a href="https://www.aad.org/member/career/li/mentor">https://www.aad.org/member/career/li/mentor</a>			✓	✓	Yes	Both	Flexible	No	NA
American Contact Dermatitis Society Mentoring Award	<a href="https://www.contactderm.org/education/awards-and-grants/mentoring-awards#:~:text=ACDS%20Mentoring%20Awards%20are%20granted,may%20not%20be%20available%20at">https://www.contactderm.org/education/awards-and-grants/mentoring-awards#:~:text=ACDS%20Mentoring%20Awards%20are%20granted,may%20not%20be%20available%20at</a>		✓	✓	✓	No	Both	Flexible	Yes	Up to \$3000
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery - Resident Preceptorship Program	<a href="https://www.asds.net/medical-professionals/education/educational-exchange-and-mentorship/resident-preceptorship-program">https://www.asds.net/medical-professionals/education/educational-exchange-and-mentorship/resident-preceptorship-program</a>		✓			No	In person	Typically 1 wk	Yes	Up to \$500
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery - Early Career Preceptorship Program	<a href="https://www.asds.net/medical-professionals/education/educational-exchange-and-mentorship/early-career-preceptorship-program">https://www.asds.net/medical-professionals/education/educational-exchange-and-mentorship/early-career-preceptorship-program</a>				✓	Yes	In person	Flexible	Yes	Up to \$500
American Society of Dermatopathology Mentorship Award	<a href="https://www.asdp.org/mentorship/">https://www.asdp.org/mentorship/</a>		✓			No	In person	2 wk	Yes	Up to \$1500
International Society of Dermatology	<a href="https://www.intsocderm.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3298">https://www.intsocderm.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3298</a>		✓	✓	✓	Yes	In person	Flexible; usually 1-2 mo	Yes	Up to \$1000
Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology Editorial Mentorship Program	<a href="https://www.aad.org/member/career/li/mentor/jaad-mentorship">https://www.aad.org/member/career/li/mentor/jaad-mentorship</a>			✓	✓	Yes	Virtual	1 yr	No	NA
Medical Dermatology Society Mentorship Program	<a href="https://www.meddermsociety.org/mentorship-program/">https://www.meddermsociety.org/mentorship-program/</a>		✓	✓	✓	Yes	Both	4 wk	Yes	Up to \$2000

National Psoriasis Foundation Mentor Program	<a href="https://www.psoriasis.org/mentor-program/">https://www.psoriasis.org/mentor-program/</a>		✓	✓	✓	No	Both	Flexible	Yes	Travel stipend for in-person experiences
Pediatric Dermatology Research Alliance Mentorship Program	<a href="https://pedraresearch.org/mentorship-program/">https://pedraresearch.org/mentorship-program/</a>	✓	✓	✓	Yes	Both	2 yr	No	NA	
Skin of Color Society - Mentorship Program	<a href="https://skinofcolorsociety.org/mentorship-programs/">https://skinofcolorsociety.org/mentorship-programs/</a>		✓	✓	✓	Yes	Both	Varies	No	NA
Skin of Color Society - Observership Grant	<a href="https://skinofcolorsociety.org/observership-grant/">https://skinofcolorsociety.org/observership-grant/</a>	✓	✓	✓	✓	Yes	In person	1-4 wk	Yes	Up to \$2000
Society for Pediatric Dermatology - Mentorship Award	<a href="https://pedsderm.net/grants-awards/mentorship-grant-awards/">https://pedsderm.net/grants-awards/mentorship-grant-awards/</a>	✓	✓			Yes	In person	2-4 wk	Yes	Up to \$4000
Society for Pediatric Dermatology - Peer Mentoring Groups	<a href="https://pedsderm.net/resources/peer-mentorship-program/">https://pedsderm.net/resources/peer-mentorship-program/</a>				✓	Yes	Virtual	1 yr	No	NA
US Cutaneous Lymphoma Consortium Young Physician Mentorship Program	<a href="https://www.usclc.org/files/2015MentorApplInfo.pdf">https://www.usclc.org/files/2015MentorApplInfo.pdf</a>		✓	✓	✓	Yes	In person	2-4 wk	Yes	Up to \$3000
Women's Dermatologic Society Mentorship Award	<a href="https://www.womensderm.org/awards/award-programs/mentorship-award-program">https://www.womensderm.org/awards/award-programs/mentorship-award-program</a>		✓	✓	✓	Yes	Both	Flexible	Yes	Up to \$2000
Women's Dermatologic Society Summer Research Fellowship for Under-represented Minorities in Medicine Students	<a href="https://www.womensderm.org/awards/award-programs/student-summer-research-fellowship">https://www.womensderm.org/awards/award-programs/student-summer-research-fellowship</a>	✓				No	Both	6-12 wk	Yes	Up to \$5000

✓ indicates that mentorship is available for this group.

AAD, American Academy of Dermatology; *mo*, months; *NA*, not applicable; *US*, United States; *USD*, United States dollars; *wk*, week; *yr*, year.

\*Both indicates that the mentor/mentee can select either virtual, in person, or a blend of the two.



**Fig 1.** Recommendations for improving mentorship opportunities for medical students.

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