

THE NAMS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Think about it! The North American Menopause Society Mentorship Program

MEET THE NAMS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The idea of a Mentorship Program sponsored by The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) was hatched during a brainstorming session of the NAMS Research Affairs (RAF) Committee in 2008. The question on the table was how to increase the quantity and quality of menopause research and at the same time support or launch early careers in research. Pauline M. Maki, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, suggested pairing an experienced investigator (a mentor) with a member just beginning a research career or considering a hypothesis (a mentee). The concept was that each 2-year mentor/mentee term would conclude with the presentation of their collaborative research at the NAMS Annual Meeting and ultimate publication in a scientific journal, preferably *Menopause*. Nurtured significantly by the Chair of the RAF, J. Mark Cline, DVM, PhD, DACVP, Professor of Pathology (Comparative Medicine) at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, the program was launched less than a year after its conception. Details of the program are available on the NAMS Web site at <http://www.menopause.org/mentorship.aspx>.

The initial publicity about the program attracted a large number of senior investigators who volunteered their time and energy to be mentors. The matching process then began with the solicitation of mentee applicants who ranked their mentor choices by their own areas of interest. The potential mentors then ranked the mentee candidates. The first mentor-mentee class (2009) of six pairs all got their first choices; they met at the NAMS Annual Meeting in San Diego. The second class (2010) of four pairs recently met in Chicago. Because the pairs are geographically separated, regular telephone and email conversations are required, and face-to-face interactions at the NAMS Annual Meetings are strongly encouraged.

As a member of the RAF, I set out to interview each mentor/mentee pair in the inaugural year of the Mentorship Program and began with Pauline Maki and her mentee Miriam T. Weber, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Departments of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and Neurology at the University of Rochester. Subsequent interviews will appear in future issues of *Menopause*.

THOUGHTS FROM THE MENTOR

Pauline recalled with fondness and appreciation an important mentor in her own career, Susan Resnick, PhD, Senior Investigator in the Cognition Section of the National Institute



on Aging in Baltimore, who provided guidance and entree to the field of cognition during Pauline's early postdoctoral years. Pauline focuses her research on the effects of sex hormones and cognition, mood, and brain function.

I asked Pauline what specific guidance she could offer her mentee. She emphasized the value of conveying to a younger investigator the importance of encouragement and perseverance in gaining funding. There are ways to go about seeking and applying for financial support for research, ways that are more often learned by slow, painful trial and error. Pauline also shared the important lessons she learned about "sailing the sea of academic life," especially structuring protected time for research. Following a team approach and seeking out collaborators who can buoy one's own weaknesses (statistics being a good example of hers) and open up new pathways are valuable lessons to impart.

Pauline takes great pride in her "academic offshoots." She views her mentoring role as the "trunk of a tree" with spreading branches that represent a growing number of young investigators who go on to influence others. This process produces many long-term, mutually satisfying relationships.

When asked about the major issue facing the study of the relationship between sex steroid hormones and cognitive function, Pauline focused on the limitations, feasibilities, and weaknesses of our current methods of study. Pauline's views are similar to the teachings of the late Trudy Bush, PhD, MHS—that basic and clinical science aim to know the truth and every study gives one view of the truth, yet many views are required to see the truth. Pauline realistically acknowledges that the proper 20- to 25-year randomized clinical trial to address this issue will never be conducted, and that the challenge is, therefore, to develop proxies (eg, new methods such as magnetic resonance imaging or mentee Mia Weber's use below of predictive cognitive tests) to come closer to the truth.

THOUGHTS FROM THE MENTEE

Miriam "Mia" Weber recalled her excitement when she learned she would be paired with Pauline Maki, and she has

not been disappointed. Mia is a clinical neuropsychologist who assesses cognition in patients with neurologic disorders, head injuries, or stroke. Her research interest focuses on the interaction of hormones with cognition and mood during the perimenopausal transition. She believes her comprehensive, expanded battery of tests provides a more sensitive method for measuring mood and cognition.

Mia pointed out that one of the major benefits of the NAMS Mentorship Program is that it provides a mechanism to solve the problem of the lack of a local expert at one's institution.

Mia is grateful for the impact of her mentor in opening doors and creating new relationships with key people in her field. Regular conversations with Pauline have been instrumental in Mia's planning and writing of new grants and in organizing and analyzing her data. For instance, Pauline provided an insightful review of Mia's application to the National Institutes of Health for a Career Development Award.



With joyful enthusiasm in her voice, Mia expressed great optimism about the ongoing impact of her mentor/mentee relationship. Since her first involvement with the program at the 2009 NAMS Annual Meeting, Mia has been extremely impressed with all the benefits the Society offers.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

The NAMS Mentorship Program is a process that can bring to fruition new thoughts and creative ideas that might be bubbling up from personal clinical experience or just from a perusal of the scientific literature. As Pauline says, the process begins simply "with a good application to NAMS about an interest or idea, a problem to solve, a question to be answered, or a new thought that needs developing."

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