## MENTORING HEALTH PROFESSIONS STUDENTS: AMBASSADOR'S GUIDE

Use this guide to foster the mentoring process and provide structure to the relationship you form with the student you are guiding. This guide will provide numerous suggestions on topics to cover and will give you a place to start.

### At the Outset

At your first meeting, you can get started by collecting some basic information. You may already have information about the student; write the information you already have onto this sheet and fill in the missing information. Keep in mind that all of the information will not apply to every student. Keep this sheet with your notes from each session.

Name: _____

Discipline/Specialty: _____

Education: _____

Current Employer: _____ Year in School: _____

Year in Residency/Training: _____ Time Spent in Clinical Arena: _____

Professional Affiliations: _____

Hobbies/Outside Interests: _____

### Session One: Core Questions

At the beginning of your relationship, work together to identify expectations for the exchange. Topics you may discuss include:

- Your vision of a mentoring relationship
- The areas in which the student may need particular support

You should also be prepared to answer questions about your own background. Your student will want to learn about what you bring to the relationship.

Listen to your student's needs and expectations. The most successful mentoring relationships are piloted by the person seeking guidance. Use these discussion questions to learn about the student's experiences, anxieties, and needs, and be prepared to respond to any questions such as:

- What experiences impacted your decision to go into health care?
- When did you first become aware of disparities in health care, and what motivated you to direct your career toward helping to address these issues?
- What do you hope to gain from working in a community with limited access to health care?
- What do you hope you can achieve personally and professionally through this work?

You may be asked many different questions, ranging from the geography of the area where you both work, to career goals and the nuts-and-bolts of being an NHSC provider. In your first meeting, be prepared to answer questions such as:

- Is there any NHSC-related paperwork that I need to file with the Financial Aid Department?
- What tax forms do I need for deducting my NHSC Scholarship award?
- How does the NHSC keep track of my progress?
- Where can I be assigned? Do I have a role in choosing my assignment?
- What can I expect when I go into a clinical rotation?
- What is the academic review process like?
- What are the unspoken rules of the campus?
- What are the challenges and benefits of working in this particular clinic or community?
- How should I make the most of this opportunity so that it benefits my career?
- When I go into the field, how can I best contribute to the team of health practitioners working in my facility? How can I be a valued resource?

At the end of the session, determine the communication method that works best for both of you for planning future meetings and for informal Q&A.

### Session Two: Prepare to Work in a Culturally Diverse Community

One of the most significant barriers to health care is the cultural divide between patients and their health care providers. Students sometimes find jobs in communities very different from those they have experienced, and one part of your role as a mentor is preparing them to meet the challenges they might face as a result. In this session, you should learn about the student's background in community service and discuss the relevance of cultural competency.

The following questions will help you to identify the student's strengths and weaknesses in areas important for cultural competency:

- What multicultural experiences have you had? What did you learn from these experiences that will be useful when you begin your job?
- What do you know about this community and the general culture of the population?
- What languages do you speak?
- Do you know of any approaches to patient communication, diagnosis, or treatment that may be pertinent to this community? What are your thoughts about these trends?
- How might they enhance the services you provide?
- What excites you most about working here? What are you most apprehensive about?

You may be asked questions about the culture and community. You can help the student become familiar with the region by discussing your experiences. Be prepared to answer questions such as:

- What can I expect when I start working in an NHSC-approved site?
- In your experience, how do patients expect us to interact with them?
- What are the most common challenges you find in working with patients at this clinic?
- What are the most common health issues?
- What is the best way to communicate with patients here in order to deliver health messages and see results in their response to health issues?
- Have you faced any cultural challenges in your career? How can I learn from your experiences?

## Session Three: Career Goals

Although NHSC providers can leave their NHSC-approved site after a minimum of two years, we hope their service experience will prepare them for a challenging and meaningful career as a health care practitioner, and they will continue to offer primary care to communities in need.

Use these questions to discuss the student's career goals:

- What do you hope to learn from your experience with the NHSC?
- How do you plan to prepare yourself for this experience over the next few years?
- What are your long-term career goals? What do you hope to do when you have completed your service commitment?
- How will this experience help you to pursue your career goals and identify future opportunities in primary care, especially in communities with a shortage of health professionals?
- Do you have any questions about finding a job or Job Opportunities List?

The student may ask you to link them with professional contacts in your networks or inquire about clinical rotation opportunities, health professional associations that might provide networking opportunities, professional development opportunities, and other resources.

Encourage your student to learn about the experiences of other providers who have worked in Health Professional Shortage Areas. The success stories posted on the NHSC Web site feature the experiences of providers who have pursued careers in communities unfamiliar to them and experienced great personal and professional rewards as a result.

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