

mentoring

Esther Chevassut looks at the impact we can have mentoring the next generation of nurses and midwives



Have you ever thought about your influence on the people around you? Or the influence they are having on you? Who do you look up to? And who looks up to you?

All of us will be in certain relationships that significantly influence us. There will be people who particularly invest in us and our growth, while there will be others in whom we are particularly investing, be it in our workplace, personal life, or spiritual family. A mentoring relationship has enormous potential for influence and impact, as a mentor comes closely alongside a mentee or learner and contributes to their development.

what does it look like?

The focus of mentoring is to develop the whole person, so the techniques are broad and require wisdom to use appropriately. A 1995 business model¹ suggested these five approaches:

1. **accompanying**
committing to the learning process side-by-side with the learner
2. **sowing**
developing the learner by teaching information ahead of the time it will be needed. They might not 'get' it now, but they will later

3. **catalysing**
plunging the learner into change or 'the deep end', inspiring new ways of thinking
4. **showing**
demonstrating skills or techniques using real-life examples
5. **harvesting**
creating awareness of what's been taught and learned through questioning and reflecting

The personal growth and learning during our training to become a nurse or midwife and during the transition into work is monumental and can be significantly affected by mentoring. Working in healthcare is a rollercoaster journey and a career in which learning never stops!

Reflecting on my days as a student nurse and in my first year working as a newly qualified nurse on a busy medical ward, I can vouch for the impact (both positive and negative) that mentors had on me. I have realised the significance of how mentors approach correcting or critiquing – constructively or destructively. Now that I am a few years into my career and mentoring students myself, I have become especially mindful of how I do this! Before confronting a mentee or student about their time-keeping or poor prioritisation of work, for example, we must be mindful of


the time and situation in which this conversation takes place. If the mentee is stressed and overwhelmed, it may be a time to take something off their workload rather than to expose their failings. We should give mentees opportunities to talk and reflect, to be genuinely and gently listened to, and to find ways to improve, collaboratively with their mentor. All mixed with a good dollop of encouragement!

Furthermore, as followers of Christ, changed by his grace and living as his witnesses in a world which is often hostile to him, mature Christian mentors are vital to our spiritual growth. Jesus was a fantastic example of a mentor in the gospels. We can examine how he spoke to, taught, and fed great crowds of people. But his primary mentorship was to his disciples, and three in particular – Peter, James, and John – in whom he invested deeply, guided daily, and with whom he lived everyday life. Spiritual mentorship involves teaching, living as an example, praying, encouraging, and enabling growth.

Here at CMF, we recognise the overlap between being a nurse, midwife, or healthcare student *and* being a follower of Jesus and some of the unique challenges that throws up! The ‘Encourager’ mentoring scheme is one of the ways we have seen many students and newly-

qualified professionals better supported. We believe it could be a great help to many more. Within a particular town or city, we pair younger students with older Christian students in their field, or with working or retired nurses or midwives willing to be an ‘Encouragers’. The Encourager commits to pray for their student once a week, contact them once a month and meet with them once a term, as a minimum. It is intentionally low commitment to suit healthcare workers and students who are often very busy people with varied schedules, full-time placements, and academic pressures.

Christian students are also often involved in their churches and Christian Unions, where they may already have a mentor. The Encourager scheme aims uniquely to bring together both spiritual and clinical support, aiding the growth and flourishing of Christian nurses and midwives.

Get in touch at nursesandmidwives@cmf.org.uk if you would like us to help you set up an Encourager scheme in your area or pair you up with a specialist Christian mentor. 

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1. Aubrey B & Cohen P. *Working Wisdom: Timeless Skills and Vanguard Strategies for Learning Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1995:23, 44–47, 96–97