

How to establish a mentoring program in your home country

Eva-Maria Casata (Austria) and Dorothee Schmid (Germany)

What is Mentoring?

The term "Mentor" comes from the Greek mythology. According to Homer Odysseus told his friend Mentor to please look after his son Telemachos as long as he (Odysseus) was at war. And he said: "Please treat my son like a father and friend, accompany him, educate him and introduce him into the society."

Today, Mentoring means a strategy to support young leaders in companies. The person with less experience gets supported and strengthened in his/her individual development and gains from the mentorship.

We use the term "Mentoring" when we talk about hospital visits of (long term) cancer survivors / young adults (= Mentors) to newly diagnosed children, teenagers or young adults = Patients).

Possible tasks for Mentors:

- To pass experiences to patients which only survivors can pass (personal exchange of experiences)
- To give Information (e.g. about regional survivor groups, national survivor meetings, literature, homepages, ...)
- To give hope!
- To offer support to the patient (e.g. to be with him/her during a session with the doctor, ...)

Who – What – When – Where?

Who?

It is possible, that mentorship looks very different, depending on who is the mentor and who is the patient!

General Requirements for Mentors:

- At least 18 years old
- At least 2 years in remission (after treatment)
- The mentor is convinced that he/she is able to do it
- The mentor attends the mentoring program regularly

What?

Possible tasks for mentors:

- (Regular) visits to the hospital and maybe also at home
- To take up contact with the national childhood cancer organisation, with the local parents organisation as well as with the hospital in your city
- Build up a group of other mentors (local/ national) and share your experiences with them
- Educate yourself in communication skills
- Define guidelines for mentors and maybe much more

When?

When can you do mentoring?

- You can start as soon as you want
- Please be sure you are ready for doing this!
- It would be the best to first establish a mentoring program in your home country and to talk about others who want to be a mentor, share your ideas and prepare yourself for the visits.
- How often you do the visits depends on yourself!

Where?

Where are mentoring programs already established?

- Finland since 2000
- England since?
- Austria since 2005
- Germany since 2006
- Netherlands since 2006

- Other countries???

Guidelines for mentors

- To talk to somebody about his/her problems doesn't mean that you have to solve these problems!
- Do "active listening" (listen not only what the patient says, but also the way he/she is saying something to you)
- Do not talk (too much) about your own experiences, but when you do, always remember everyone has different experiences
- Don't be shy! (the patient might be more nervous than you and you are the mentor!)
- At the end of the visit: ask how it was for the patient, whether you should come again, what you can do better the next time, what was helpful, ...
- Maybe a few days after the visit: call the patient and just ask: "How are you?"
- Always remember: mentoring means to give something to somebody! You as a mentor give the patient the possibility to talk to you about his/her feelings, experiences, concerns,
- DO NOT GIVE MEDICAL ADVICE/ NO MEDICAL INFORMATION!!!

If you are planning a workshop, start with role playing:

- Sit. 1: You are a young adult, child is 6 years old. The child gets surgery in a week, one leg has to be removed. You lost one leg five years ago. Talk with the child about your experiences in a child sensible way. The parents are also in the room.
- Sit. 2: You are a young adult, the patient is 13 years old. He/she wants to talk with you alone, but mother/father is still in the room and doesn't want to leave the room. Find words to get a good situation to talk with the teenager.
- Sit. 3: You are a young adult, same age as the patient. You have had leukemia, but the patient has a brain tumor and is afraid about the surgery (if everything is fine after surgery or not). Can you help? How can you help?
- Sit. 4: You are a young adult, one year after treatment, you visit an young adult who knows the diagnosis since one week (same kind of cancer you had). He/She is afraid about dying and how the chemotherapy will be. Sometimes he/she starts to cry. He/She also wants medical tips from you (about best chemo-therapy). How can you react? How can you calm him/her down?

Steps for establishing a mentoring program

- 1: Share your idea, find others
- 2: Make meetings with other mentors (to further educate yourself, to exchange experiences, ...)
- 3: Financing your group, get professional support
- 4: Make inform the hospital and the parent group
- 5: Make inform children, teenagers, young adults under treatment

*If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask us:
Eva-Maria Casata Austria): survivors@gmx.at
Dorothee Schmid (Germany): dorotheeschmid@web.de*