

NEPHROLOGY FELLOWSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM-
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Mentorship Program

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Philosophy:

The mentor-mentee relationship is a vital part of the medical education experience. Mentors provide critical professional guidance to early-career colleagues, while mentees infuse labs and clinics with fresh new ideas and diversity.

Requirements of a Successful Mentorship Program:

Mentorship is a special partnership between two people based on common goals and expectations, focus, mutual trust and respect. Successful mentoring requires commitment to this process by both mentors and mentees and serves as an important career advancement mechanism for both. Mentors provide guidance and promote a mentee's accomplishment in any of the following domains: academic pursuits, clinical excellence, life/professional goals and work-life balance. Gail et al. wrote, "Development of an academic career easily follows a clinical course for which there are multiple role models; however, development of an academic research career involves few role models, and rarely do instructional guides reach out to the new faculty" (1). In addition to professional aptitude, a broad supportive infrastructure and a person and time-specific continuous mentor-mentee relationship are essential components for a successful career. Positive mentoring relationships require trust, respect, shared information, resources, expectations as well as collaborative problem solving.

Goals and Objectives of the Division of Nephrology Mentorship Program:

The goal of the Mentorship Program is to provide structured mentoring and support to Nephrology trainees at Western University that would bring professional fulfillment to academic and community physicians.

Navigating the job-finding challenge: Nephrology is perceived as a subspecialty with few Canadian employment opportunities. This results in job-finding difficulties amongst newly trained Nephrologists. The reasons cited for this are multifactorial; related to both the individual (an inability to find a job in the location of their choice) and the systemic processes used by divisions for hiring (e.g., inconsistent advertising) (2). Through the Mentorship program, the Division will work with the trainee toward navigating these challenges and exploring possible employment opportunities in academic or community Nephrology.

Research Career: Despite the wide array of research opportunities (ranging from basic science, translational research, medical education, biophysics and clinical epidemiology) within the Nephrology Division at Western, incoming trainees may be unaware of these avenues and would benefit from having a local, experienced research mentor to guide their career trajectory. The goal of the Mentorship program is to match mentors with self-identified mentees and establish an environment for desirable mentor-mentee relationship to aid in career development. Providing increased research mentorship would help increase and sustain the research workforce, produce more robust research, and as a result improved patient care.

Further Subspecialty Training: Upon completion of core Nephrology training, several options for additional clinical subspecialty training are available to junior Nephrologists. Prominent among these are fellowships in renal transplantation, home based dialysis modalities (peritoneal dialysis and home hemodialysis) and glomerulonephritis. The Mentorship program will aim for clearer communication between trainees and the Division regarding the paths to additional training after certification based on both personal passion and future employment opportunities.

Structure of the Mentorship Program:

It is understandable that trainees joining the Nephrology Program at Western would be undifferentiated and undecided as far as their career choices are concerned. Experience and exposure would help them solidify their career trajectory i.e. academic Nephrology vs. community practise.

- During orientation day i.e. the first day of Nephrology fellowship training at Schulich, the Program Director will provide the incoming PGY-4 trainees with a summary of the wide and extensive range of research opportunities available at Western Nephrology including basic science, translational, transplantation, clinical epidemiology, biophysics, and medical education.
- The Program Director will introduce the trainees to the different faculty members within the Division of Nephrology with an expertise in each of the research domains listed above.
- An overview of the available research infrastructure such as the Kidney Clinical Research Unit (KCRU), Gunaratnam Lab, Matthew Mailing Center for Translational Transplant Studies, Lawson Health Research Institute, Robarts Research Institute, and Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) will be provided.
- Opportunities available at Schulich for trainees inclined to complete a Masters degree or post-doctoral training will also be reviewed.
- The Division of Nephrology at Schulich offers advanced training in the form of one-year post-certification Clinical Fellowships in renal transplantation, home dialysis and glomerular disease. The application process for these will be reviewed and the contact information of the relevant faculty member will be provided.

- On a quarterly basis, trainees meet with their Academic Advisors to review their evaluations. Academic Advisors will also discuss career planning with trainees to help aid in networking with other nephrologists and to help with elective planning.
- In December of every academic year, a career-planning meeting will be held between the trainees and the Chair/Chief – Division of Nephrology, Program Director, and Associate Program Director. The purpose of this meeting is to understand the trainee’s career customization profile, discuss career progression, goals, current and future needs.
- At the career-planning meeting, an attempt will be made to create transparency regarding trade-offs and choices that can ultimately lead to better planning, better decisions, and greater satisfaction. Some arrangements are possible, and some are not, given the constraints of the Department/Division and prevailing workforce environment.
- Based on the trainee’s career customization model i.e. academic medicine vs. community practise, the Division will provide additional support by establishing contact with research faculty or community Nephrologists as the case may be, to offer further guidance. Trainees who feel decided in their career paths will be matched according to their interests to an advisor who is a senior faculty attending. The advisor will be chosen for their connections with other faculty, approachability, and natural ability for counselling. The advisor will then facilitate connecting the trainee to a mentor with expertise relevant to his/her particular interests. The trainee will then follow up and ideally create a long-standing relationship with that mentor, whom they can look to for advice on crafting their professional experiences to support their goals.

Resources:

To promote and foster a healthy mentor – mentee relationship, the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) has developed an extensive set of electronic educational resources presented in brief animations, podcasts and other media. These resources detail effective interpersonal communication, identifying the right mentor or mentee, navigating mentorship challenges, cultivating the mentoring relationship and assessing a mentee’s understanding of expectations (3).

References:

1. Gail NJ, Smith RJ, Graboyes EM, Panieilo RC, Gubbels SP. Guide to academic research career development. *Laryngoscope Invest Otolaryngol.* 2016;1:19-24.
2. Ward DR, Manns B, Kappel JE. Results of the 2014-2015 Canadian Society of Nephrology workforce survey. *Can J Kidney Health Dis.* 2016;3:25.
3. www.asn-online.org