

Medical Dermatology Society
Mentorship Program
Mentor: Melissa I. Costner, M.D., University of Texas Southwestern, Dallas
Mentee: Renee H. Grau, M.D., University of Oklahoma
March 13-April 7, 2006

As one reflects on the highlights of her medical training and certain people or moments that changed the course of her career, my experience at the University of Texas Southwestern Department of Dermatology with Dr. Melissa Costner tops them all. Early during my residency I became interested academic dermatology. I discovered the enjoyment and excitement of new and challenging cases, teaching and clinical research. During my second year as a dermatology resident, Dr. Richard Sontheimer joined the faculty at the University of Oklahoma. His mentorship and example solidified my commitment to academia and fostered my interest in connective tissue disease. When the opportunity to study at another institution presented, I jumped at the chance to work with others who had successfully and happily embraced medical dermatology. I chose to work with Dr. Costner due to her shared interest in connective tissue disease and, thankfully, she agreed to be my mentor.

During my four weeks, I was able to see a wide variety of patients from dermatomyositis, and scleroderma to lupus and mixed connective tissue disease. I started to see how subtle changes in the skin can lead to early diagnosis and an increased likelihood of therapeutic success. I learned how an astute clinician can pick up a subtle case of early scleroderma or longstanding undiagnosed SAPHO (synovitis, acne, pustulosis, hyperostosis, and osteitis). I witnessed the value of “thinking outside the box” in successfully treating recalcitrant Behcet syndrome with biologics. Such patients were adversely and severely affected by their disease. I am impressed with how one dermatologist can positively

impact the quality of so many lives. This is the type of experience that significantly shapes the trajectory of one's career and creates a longing to help others in the same, meaningful way.

In addition to the wide array of clinical pearls I captured, I was honored to help write a review paper on connective tissue disease. I enhanced what I learned in the clinic during the day with the research and writing I did in the evening. We wrote a comprehensive update on connective tissue disease which had been submitted for publication in *Seminars in Cutaneous Medicine and Surgery*.

One of the most significant and unexpected benefits of the mentorship was to witness Dr. Costner's management of her professional career as a clinician, researcher, and professor with her personal life as a wife, mother, and daughter. This is something that one cannot read in books or learn "on-line". I am incredibly encouraged by her example. She is a physician with a clear focus on her goals in both arenas which allows her to gracefully and successfully achieve the balance others rarely find.

Finally, I had fun (simply stated but truly experienced). I felt welcome and "at home". Dr. Costner arranged for me to work with a rheumatologist (who also happens to be her husband), a phototherapist (who harnesses light in treating connective tissue disease), and other dermatologists who focus on areas of medical dermatology not represented at my home institution. This enriched and complemented my experience. In addition, she invited me and my husband into her home for dinner (and yes, she is an excellent cook, too!).

As a result of my experience, I plan to continue to study connective tissue disease as a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma Department of Dermatology with a

specific interest in scleroderma and morphea. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Medical Dermatology Society for making this mentorship possible and investing in my career.