

Medical Dermatology Society Mentorship Program Summary:

During the month of November 2013, I had the great honor to complete a mentorship with Dr. Lindy Fox at the University of California San Francisco Dermatology Department. I am extremely grateful to the Medical Dermatology Society for supporting this mentorship, which greatly enhanced my dermatology training and provided a unique opportunity to learn from one of the brightest, most dedicated dermatologists I have ever encountered.

My mentorship with Dr. Fox was focused primarily on inpatient hospital consult dermatology. As many are aware, Dr. Fox is Director of the Dermatology Consultation Service at UCSF Hospitals. While I had spent some time providing inpatient dermatology consults at my home institution, I had never worked under an attending dermatologist with so much experience and focus on inpatient dermatology. As part of Dr. Fox's team (which included 2 other dermatology residents and a complex medical dermatology fellow), I encountered numerous complex, unique, and challenging patients with a myriad of dermatologic issues, both in the emergent and inpatient settings.

One of the things I appreciated most about working with Dr. Fox was that she took time at each patient encounter to teach us, despite the busy schedule and long hours. With each patient she found a teaching point to expand on, challenging us to expand our differential diagnoses and often tasking us to read further to find explanations to the questions we could not answer. Even the most straightforward seeming case would prompt a thorough discussion of diagnostic criteria or treatment options.

As any good dermatologist does, Dr. Fox first focuses on recognizing primary morphology, and using that to direct a differential diagnosis. While dermatopathology would be used to narrow or guide our differential, she taught me to always trust the patient's exam and their dermatologic morphology, even when the biopsy results might not necessarily fit. She tasked me to analyze each case beyond the straightforward or most likely diagnoses, emphasizing the importance of ruling out the most life-threatening or dangerous possibility, even if statistically unlikely. This was one of the most important lessons I learned, about how inpatient dermatology demands a different sort of perspective than outpatient dermatology. One must assume the worst possible scenario, so as to not chance missing a life-threatening diagnosis.

With every single patient, Dr. Fox demanded that her team discover any unexpected connections between the patient's dermatologic issue with their other health problems, always striving to find a common thread between them, rather than just accepting that their skin problem was separate. Often searching for this connection involved scouring the medical literature. I learned so much by reading those papers, even if they were not always the key to diagnosing our case. Since working with Dr. Fox, I find myself looking to the literature more frequently when I encounter a dermatologic puzzle I can't work out, or when I need guidance in making treatment decisions.

One of the more memorable moments during the rotation came when we were asked to evaluate a patient with an oral ulcer. When Dr. Fox asked me to provide a differential diagnosis, I proudly recited about 6 possibilities. Imagine my surprise and amazement when Dr. Fox provided 30 additional differential diagnoses for oral ulcers. You can be certain that I read extensively on oral ulcers that very

night, having realized my knowledge gap. Working with Dr. Fox and seeing her in action is quite inspiring; it certainly gave me continual motivation to read more, learn more, and to ask more questions.

Finally, Dr. Fox was a generous and willing mentor during my month with her. She carved out time to talk to me about my career goals, including how to incorporate inpatient dermatology into my practice. She was very open about discussing her experience in academic medicine and how she developed her expertise in inpatient dermatology. She made sure I had time to explore some of my other interests during the month; connecting me with Dr. Beth Ruben to learn some nail pathology, and connecting me with Dr. Tim Berger in his complex medical dermatology clinic. And, Dr. Fox left the door open for future discussions and mentoring; this is so much more than I would expect from just a one month rotation.

In sum, I am very thankful to the Medical Dermatology Society for supporting this mentorship. I learned so much from Dr. Fox about how to analyze complex patients and how to approach an inpatient dermatology patient. Her passion for her craft is admirable, and it has inspired me to continue to take care of inpatient dermatology patients once I've finished residency, as well as stay involved in resident and medical student education. I wish every resident could have the great pleasure to work with her; it would make us all better residents and better dermatologists! I hope many future residents will take advantage of this opportunity through the MDS mentorship program.