Case Example

First year postdoctoral fellows basically pursue an independent area of study. The mentees choose their own projects, plan their own experiments, and meet with the mentor every 2-3 months (as the mentor travels extensively) to discuss data, figures, and conclusions for papers. The mentees know that regardless of how they perform, the mentor will write a glowing generic recommendation for any position to which they apply and that the mentee can take their projects to their next position.

Case Example Questions

* Should the mentee ask for any changes to how he/she is being mentored?
* What are the advantages to each supervisory practice?
* What are the disadvantages to each supervisory practice?
* What responsibilities do the mentees have concerning how they are mentored and the information they receive?

Case Example

First year postdoctoral fellows in this particular area are assigned a specific project, meet weekly on an individual basis with their mentor to discuss experimental details. They keep up with the competition by seeing grants and papers reviewed by their mentor. The mentees express nervousness about their upcoming yearly evaluations, when the mentor provides each fellow with an in-depth, written performance critique. The mentor actively helps the mentee compete for the jobs for which she decides they are best suited, and her recommendation letters describe strengths and weaknesses. Parts of their project may be taken to future jobs based on a written agreement with the mentor.

Case Example Questions

* Should the mentee ask for any changes to how he/she is being mentored?
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Case Example (biomedical)

A mentee has cloned a lymphocyte gene that encodes a membrane protein. The discovery of this gene was unexpected. The mentor and mentee agree that further characterization is warranted. The mentor indicates that the nucleotide sequence of the gene should be determined, and the mentee agrees. The mentor wants the nucleotide sequence to be determined by a commercial laboratory that does such analyses on a fee-for-service basis. The mentee argues that she has had no experience in determining DNA sequences and would like to learn the technology. The mentor comments that this would be time-consuming and would unnecessarily slow down the mentee’s progress in other areas. The mentor indicates that if the mentee is interested in learning DNA sequencing, she should enroll in a techniques course at a later time. The mentee is not receptive to this suggestion, as the course will require extra hours beyond the standard workday.

Case Example Questions

* Can the mentor’s decision be justified?
* Are there other ways to resolve the issue?
* Do you think the mentor is being overly protective and that this is unnecessary?

Case Example (social/behavioral)

A new faculty member is excited to have recruited a doctoral student to work with him on his research program regarding childhood behavior. The student has a wide range of research interests and has spent several months learning about behaviors in children. Over time, she finds she has a strong developing interest in parent-child interactions as they relate to asthma control. When the faculty and the student meet to talk about research, the faculty member continues to discuss literature on child behavior and talks about developing a research proposal in this area. However, the student shares information about studies she has read about asthma control and is thinking about making this as a topic for her research. When the faculty member invites the student to join him and a colleague to work on the child behavior grant proposal during the summer, she delays responding because she would rather work with another faculty member who has projects focusing on childhood asthma.