

The image features two female doctors in white lab coats against a white background. The doctor on the left is in the foreground, smiling, with a stethoscope around her neck. The doctor on the right is slightly behind and to the right, also smiling. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# Mentoring Mostly Women

The Women's Dermatologic Society supports its 92% female membership with a wide array of programs, including a formal mentorship program designed to foster professional growth. However for many, most important, are the relationships — both social and professional — that keep on giving long after the program during which they are forged has ended.

ELLEN MEYER, MANAGING EDITOR

Founded in 1974, The Women's Dermatologic Society (WDS) is composed of approximately 1,600 members nationally and internationally, and 8% are men. They represent all sub-specialties in dermatology, working in private practice, academics and research.

*The mission of the Women's Dermatologic Society is to help women in dermatology achieve their greatest personal and professional potential by striving to foster, promote, and support women's issues in dermatology; identify, train, and recognize women leaders in dermatology; provide a forum for developing relationships and the exchange of ideas and research relevant to women's issues; and promote the highest possible standards of ethics, research, patient care and education, as well as public education.*

Several of its most active members recently spoke to *Skin & Aging* about the part

*I received \$1,000 from WDS when they gave me the Rose Hirschler award. I returned it on the stage and asked that the WDS start a mentorship program. June Robinson was President of WDS at the time and it was absolutely her initiative and money gathering that got the mentorship started. My idea perhaps but June did it!*

~Frances Storr, MD, "Founding Mother" of WDS Mentorship Awards Program



the organization — particularly its mentorship program — has played in their careers. They included: Drs. Amy Derick, Barbara Gilchrest, Wendy Roberts, Mary Lupo, Mary Maloney, Amy McMichael and Tina Alster. Among them, Drs. Derick and McMichael spoke of the mentee experience, while the others spoke about the concept of mentoring and their own experiences. All agreed that the camaraderie among women across the United States and even worldwide promoted by the organization offers a much-needed leg up to women seeking personal and professional relationships among their peers in dermatology. But they spoke most of all of the

relationships among the women brought together through the organization and what 2009 WDS President Wendy Roberts calls "the sincere enthusiasm" of its members.

#### THE MENTORSHIP AWARDS PROGRAM

As told by Wendy Roberts, who maintains a private practice in Rancho Mirage, CA, the mentorship program, which officially began in 1993, dates back to the 1991 Annual Luncheon, when Fran Storrs, professor emerita of dermatology at Oregon Health & Science University, gave then WDS President June Robinson her Rose Hirschler Award check as seed money for the development of the mentorship program in the Women's Dermatologic Society, thus becoming what Dr. Roberts calls "The Mother of the Mentorship Awards Program."

#### MENTEE PERSPECTIVE

While the WDS Mentorship Awards Program — which distributes upwards of \$100,000 per year thanks to a grant from the founding sponsor Dermik/Sanofi-Aventis — has become more formal, the mentorship arrangements and experiences vary from mentee to mentor.

Amy Derick, who maintains a private practice in Barrington, IL, was a mentee in two very different types of practices, after being encouraged to join WDS as a first-year resident by then-chief resident Linda Wang, who is now a dermatology professor at Harvard. Although Jeffrey Dover was her official mentor, his Skin-Care Physicians practice in Chestnut Hill, MA, enabled her to also shadow the other

## WDS: The Ties that Bind



Wendy Roberts, MD

As for the relationships formed, all agree they are key. “The relationships *are* WDS. It’s more than a part of the organization; it *is* the organization,” says Dr. Roberts.

Dr. Maloney says she sees WDS as filling a need women still have. “We don’t go to the locker room and chest bump with each other the way men can to bond and get out our aggressions, and, even now, a woman who is as assertive and aggressive as a man is perceived negatively.” She mentions a WDS member who jokes about wanting to give a lecture called *Leading for the Terminally Shy*. She and I are a good team, “She slows me down and I speed her up.”



Mary Maloney, MD

Dr. McMichael says it’s the lifelong connections and friendships that are what the WDS is all about. “When there were few women in dermatology, those friendships were all some practicing female dermatologists had as support. Now that there are many women in dermatology, those friendships are even more important to make sure that we are not lost in the shuffle of competition. It makes you stop and take time to enjoy the camaraderie of the specialty, while celebrating new knowledge in our practice area. There are some you barely know but still learn from because of their commitment to leadership. There are other women that you get to know while taking part in the many parts of the WDS organization. There is every level of fellowship,” she concludes.



Amy McMichael, MD



Barbara Gilchrest, MD

Dr. Gilchrest says the Society can benefit anyone in the profession. “The Society itself is so beautifully open minded and accords great respect to people’s efforts, whatever they wish to do — private practice, academic laboratory based career, academic clinical scholar career, industry or other. It’s very empowering to women at every level.”

physicians — all of whom are professors at prominent New England medical schools including Harvard, Dartmouth, Yale, Boston University and Tufts.

She describes Dr. Dover’s practice as “a wonderful practice set up on an academic model and very segmented, with separate specialists in different areas, all conducting trials.” There she had a chance to get to know top-notch specialists, including Kenneth Arndt with whom she chatted about their mutual interest in tattoo removal, and who later used her research for a paper.

But it was her mentorship with Mary Lupo, who maintains an “integrated practice” in New Orleans, that taught her more about the interactional nuances involved in treating a varied mix of patients, especially cosmetic patients. “It’s hard for me even now to bring up cosmetic issues, so it was great to watch not just the techniques but the talking part, the interaction,” she explains.

It is these relationships and others through WDS that continue to support her in her growing private practice. “Your residency training doesn’t teach

much about the business of going into solo private practice. It’s very hard starting out to know how to set up. It’s important to have guidance because you can make costly mistakes if you’re not wise about choices.”

Dr. Derick says as a result of this network of women, she feels she has resources she can turn to for advice, all over the country, to discuss which new laser to purchase or the best software system for her practice. She says she has also learned to seek such advice from practitioners whose styles most closely match her own.

Amy McMichael, who is with the Department of Dermatology, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, NC, says she went on “the trip of a lifetime” to study under Robin Marks for 1 month in Melbourne, Australia.

“There I studied epidemiology of many dermatology disorders, but more importantly, I was able to observe his high-functioning research unit studying under his organized and directed guidance. I was also able to observe the practice of dermatology in another country, which taught me more than any published research paper,” she says.

### THE MENTORSHIP EXPERIENCE

Reflecting the goals of the mentorship program and the WDS, Dr. McMichael says, “Mentoring involves the opening of your practice and your experience to a willing party, in order to enrich her practice, her knowledge of your specialty area, and her lifelong connection to another woman in dermatology. The beauty of the mentorship is that it can be chosen to fit any preference. The mentor and mentee determine the need and the ultimate outcome of the experience.”

Most agreed that the greatest bang for the buck lies in creating close and lasting relationships that go beyond surgical techniques and other training.

Dr. Lupo regards mentoring as “a form of mothering” and cites “a desire to learn and to bond with the mentor” as desirable qualities in the mentee. She speaks with pride of her mentees in general and Dr. Derick in particular, saying “While Amy was always very special, I believe she benefited greatly by taking advantage of current men-

toring opportunities.” Dr. Lupo enjoys teaching mentees what they can’t learn from textbooks or clinics, the lessons Dr. Derick has found so helpful. “They see how I run my practice, handle patients and employees. I have former residents come back to learn new techniques as they evolve. I have found great personal pride and satisfaction at seeing the success of my mentees. Like a proud momma,” Dr. Lupo says.

Tina S. Alster, MD, Director, Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery, and Clinical Professor of Dermatology, Georgetown University Medical Center, has been with the WDS since 1990 and has been involved with the mentorship program since its inception. “It’s something I really believe in. It’s a matter of giving back to the profession and it’s an easy give because we (mentors) get just as much as we give.”

She says that although the in-office experience may be brief — ranging from 1 to 4 weeks — “the experience



at University of Massachusetts at Worcester, who is 2010 Mentor of the Year, elaborates on this point. “The mentorship is special if you make it special,” she

This, she says, sometimes means “being willing to lay yourself out there with all of the warts, too.”

Dr. Roberts agrees that it’s important to share the difficulties, but also the lessons. She maintains that she’s had no bad experiences, although at times has found it a challenge — and a learning experience for her — to work with someone who is not a good communicator. Although not a WDS mentorship experience, she recalls her fellowship with the late Bernard Ackerman, saying, “He really understood how to conduct medical business. He taught me a lot about professional demeanor, analysis of data, how to have facts on hand. There are so many little things that I still do in my day to day that I learned in fellowship. I try to pass the baton and teach



*It’s something I really believe in. It’s a matter of giving back to the profession and it’s an easy give because we (mentors) get just as much as we give.*

~Tina Alster, MD

goes on indefinitely,” and she believes that “people who get the most out of it are those who continue to have dialogue.” Dr. Alster, who was 2009 Mentor of the Year, somewhat echoes Dr. Lupo’s “proud mamma” feeling in the pride she takes in her mentees’ growth and development and in how she treasures the Christmas cards and birth announcements that mark their personal milestones. She enjoys gathering former mentees by treating them to the annual WDS luncheon. “It’s a treat for them and it’s a treat for me. As I get older, I enjoy hanging around all these young people,” she says, noting also that mentees learn from each other and often maintain the relationships begun either during their mentorship or at such gatherings. “It’s nice to see those relationships grow over the years.”

Mary Maloney, Professor of Medicine and Director of Dermatologic Surgery

explains. She shares Dr. Lupo’s sentiment that the greatest rewards are reserved for “those who want to form personal relationships.” However, she says, “It’s a two way street,” that requires two things: mentees who want to get to know their mentors and to learn about experiences

*“Your residency training doesn’t teach much about the business of going into solo private practice. ... It’s important to have guidance because you can make costly mistakes if you’re not wise about choices.”*

~Amy Derick, MD



beyond medical training and mentors who are willing to offer an authentic version of how they got where they are — including their life choices, their mistakes, their hopes and expectations. Dr. Maloney says that she thinks it’s important to “take mentees through things that will help with career development.”

mentees how to organize papers, data, how to approach problem solving and focus on the environment around the actual medical decision making.”

#### A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP

As Dr. Roberts sees it, the mentorship experience benefits both parties. “The

## Where Men Come In

The mentorship program requires only that either the mentor or mentee be a woman, and 8% of membership of WDS is male, including Joseph Jorizzo, who was a board member of WDS when Dr. McMichael joined the faculty at Wake Forest. “He suggested that I take advantage of the mentorship opportunity and get involved in the organization. He was and is one of WDS’s biggest cheerleaders,” she says.

Dr. Roberts says she has probably recruited more men than women into WDS. “Men are very important. We can’t forget that it was originally men who gave the women their leadership opportunities.” She points to “the senior dermatologists” who were chairs of programs and AAD presidents such as Richard Odom and Richard Scher, as well as the “newer guard” like Henry Lim, who saw to it that women were included on AAD committees. “For me, the men help us keep our relevancy and our balance. Look at Alan Shalita — he’s a WDS member as are most of his residents. The men are ambassadors of the WDS message — we invite them into the group, they earn leadership positions. WDS is not just about women in a world of women. I doubt there are any women in dermatology who don’t owe some thanks to a man in her professional life.” ■

mentee comes to you for your unique experiences so it’s very important to be yourself and offer what you know.” But she says she gets a lot in return, adding “I’ve learned a lot from my mentees. You learn not only from their areas of interest, information from their residency programs, but also about the way they review data, use computer technology and interact with social media.”

Dr. Alster agrees. “Many of the residents, fellows and students I’ve mentored over the years bring a lot to the equation. I may be showing them how I do things, teaching them about laser treatments and running a business, but I get a lot from them in terms of keeping me updated on the latest advances in medical derm, for example, psoriasis, which I don’t normally come across in my day-to-day practice.” She describes how she may turn to a mentee and ask, “What are they doing at the University of Texas for psoriasis right now?” Or, “What are they doing at Johns Hopkins?”

Adding that to the personal satisfaction and gratification she experiences, she surmises, “What I get from the experience far outweighs what I put into it.”

Weighing in on this topic, Dr. Lupo, who says she sees her mentoring as “an offshoot of my many years as an active clinical

faculty member at Tulane,” adds that she not only enjoys mentoring residents — through the ASDS, Tulane and LSU, as well as WDS — but she directly benefits from the experience herself: “I improve every time I teach,” she explains.

### WIDENED HORIZONS

Barbara A. Gilchrest, MD, Chair-Emeritus of the Department of Derma-

tology at Boston University School of Medicine and past WDS President, focused on the importance of the international community brought together through the WDS in general as well as the Mentorship Program. She says she has referred many residents and faculty toward the mentorship program, although her own laboratory-based work doesn’t generally lend itself to such short-term associations.

Dr. Gilchrest believes programs of this type help young doctors to understand

that “relationships count,” and that they can “build career relationships and career interests by reaching out beyond the people in the immediate environment. Such relationships can extend far beyond state and even national borders.”

Most of all, she believes that those who choose to participate in a mentorship program — particularly in another area of the country or world — learn that “in dermatology, the world is your peer group. It is particularly important as a trainee to learn that you can reach out to people you’ve never met and can certainly reach out to people in other training programs and even other countries.”

But beyond that, she stressed the gift bestowed by organizations that give dermatologists around the world access to one another, thus enabling them to grow in their particular interest in dermatology. “So many women I’ve met through the WDS have interests beyond their clinical practice. As there may be a relatively small number of people worldwide who have that same spectrum of interests, those people are an incredibly important resource and source of gratification and learning.”

### BENEFITS TO THE FIELD OF DERMATOLOGY

Dr. Roberts believes all dermatologists benefit from programs that build supportive relationships and professional skills, disseminate practice management

*I have found great personal pride and satisfaction at seeing the success of my mentees. Like a proud momma.*

~Mary Lupo, MD



improvements and in other ways contribute to excellence among all practitioners.. “Dermatology is better when practices run efficiently and when dermatologists have good outcomes, it just spreads the word that dermatologists are the doctors to go to.” ■

For more information on the WDS, visit [www.womensderm.org](http://www.womensderm.org). Its Mentorship Awards Program brochure can be also be downloaded from the *Skin & Aging* site at [www.skinandaging.com](http://www.skinandaging.com).