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# Passing the Wisdom

Growing up, my parents always taught me to do the right thing and work hard in life. They showed me that by being a genuine, hardworking individual, you can provide a better future for yourself and your family. While my parents played a major role in influencing my values and discipline, it has been my mentor, Dr. VanNostran, who helped me become the strong professional woman I am today.

I met Dr. VanNostran at an AMWA sponsored event at my medical school chapter. She was speaking to a room full of visiting students interested in a career in medicine, and her presence alone was captivating. Though her path to her “dream job” was not always direct, her story is inspirational. Like Dr. VanNostran, I did not come from a family of physicians. I immediately felt a connection with her when she spoke so honestly about her initial feelings of isolation and uncertainty during medical school.

She had humble roots in Appalachia, where she was not expected to obtain an undergraduate degree. Not only did she thrive in college, but also excelled through medical school, and was offered a prominent leadership position in an established hospital system. Of course, she hit roadblocks along the way, but her desire to help others inspired her to not only overcome these challenges, but to grow from the experiences. She attributed much of her success to having role models with whom she was able to have open and honest conversations. Dr. VanNos-

tran made sure to emphasize that it was not until she met her female physician mentor that she realized her full potential.

I made sure to get Dr. VanNostran’s contact information before we left, and we made plans to get coffee a few weeks later. Initially, I just wanted to learn more about Dr. VanNostran’s fascinating life. However, I quickly realized during our conversation that it wasn’t her story I was interested in, but how much I could learn from her in order to be an outstanding physician. I realized I had found my mentor.

“When you walk into a meeting, always be more prepared than the man in the suit next to you.”

I wanted to learn the ins and outs of being a female leader in medicine - how to be taken seriously, make a difference for my patients, and earn respect from colleagues and leadership.

*Always be prepared:*

She told me, “When you walk into a meeting, always be more prepared than the man in the suit next to you. Have a list, and be ready to contribute to the conversation in a constructive way. Soon enough, people will realize that you are serious about your work, and will listen to what you have to say.” This small tip has helped me gain respect as a

leader within my school, and attain more responsibilities for causes that I feel passionate about.

*Don't be afraid to go after what you want.*

We talked about the challenges, even today, for female students pursuing a career in medicine. She confided in me her inner conflict between having children and having a career, and what her thoughts on finding the oh-so-elusive “work-life balance”. Her choices and timing is unconventional compared to most female physicians, but she was able to have everything she wanted, and on her own terms! She helped start up a fully functional health clinic in Africa, earn the respect of her colleagues and patients, and have a happy marriage and healthy baby. Seeing that it is possible to have your dream “end goal” at the end of the road has really helped me with the fatigue of this long journey.

*Always remember to help others along the way.*

After building my own mentor relationship, I saw an immense opportunity at my medical school to help other female students connect with physician role models. Many students were looking for a place to turn, but were having difficulty finding and connecting with eager physicians. The mentors we have in the program offer us a wide array of insight and wisdom through their own experiences. Dr. VanNostan was a big proponent of helping other women building relationships and networking skills. With her support, we were able to start a mentorship program called Women in White Coats through the AMWA chapter of our medical school. Today the program has progressed to networking and social events throughout the year, and expanded to a side project mentoring high school girls interested in medicine. An unexpected outcome of this project has been the friendships and connections built between our classmates. We have a large, yet close-knit

group of students whom we can rely on when we need a friend.

As medical students, we are skilled at getting information from books, but the stories, perspectives, and inspiration our mentors and colleague have shared cannot be replicated by any text. The guidance and support with which Dr. VanNostran has provided me has undoubtedly changed my perspective on the medical career. It's revitalized my motivation of becoming a doctor, and challenges me to constantly become a better role model for others.