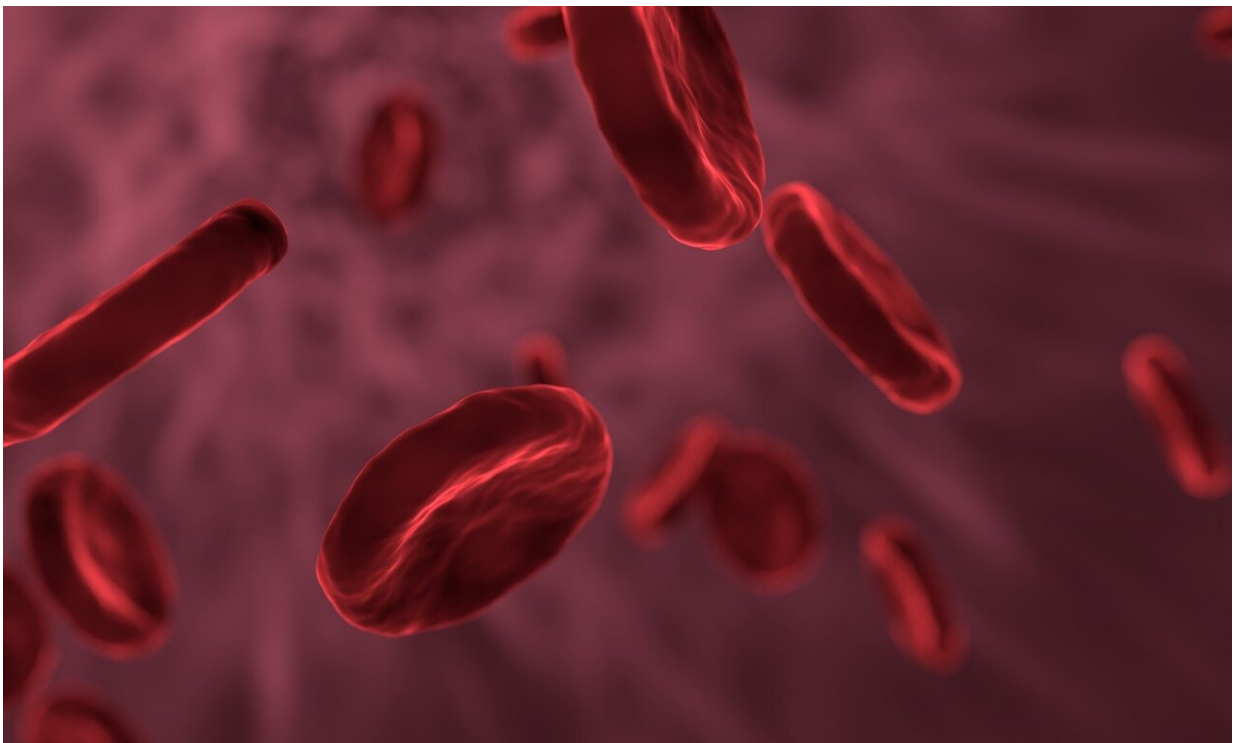


# Study finds external mentorship key in encouraging trainees to pursue classical hematology

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In a year-long pilot program, external mentorship increased confidence, furthered career development, and facilitated networking opportunities for trainees in classical hematology, according to a study published in

## [Blood Advances.](#)

Classical [hematology](#), the study of non-cancerous blood disorders such as [sickle cell anemia](#) and thrombotic and hemorrhagic disorders, is projected to face a significant workforce shortage in the coming years. The American Society of Hematology's (ASH) previous surveys of [hematology/oncology program directors](#) and [fellows](#) both found that only 5% of fellows planned to pursue classical hematology.

[Mentorship has been identified as the most important factor](#) in encouraging trainees to pursue and remain in the field, particularly in underrepresented subspecialties like classical hematology.

"I've seen trainees who were initially interested in classical hematology go on to pursue something different like [bone marrow transplantation](#) because of a lack of mentorship," said Soo Park, MD, associate professor at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine, UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center member, and study author.

She herself had considered a career in classical hematology but chose to specialize in [medical oncology](#) after encountering the same challenge. "There is a real need for mentorship in classical hematology, and an external program like this could help fulfill that need."

Under a mentorship program developed through the ASH Medical Educators Institute, Dr. Park and her colleagues paired hematology/oncology fellows interested in classical hematology with mentors outside of their institutions to meet virtually each month for one year and complete an optional scholarly project.

All 35 mentees who applied to the program were paired with a mentor based on their interests within classical hematology, area of expertise, career plans, personal experience, gender, race, ethnicity, and top choice

of mentor. Thirty-four mentors took part in the program, as one mentor's field of interest aligned closely with two mentees. Only two mentor/mentee pairings did not see the program through to completion.

The program's feasibility and impact were primarily evaluated through mentor and mentee surveys conducted six months into the program, upon completion of the program, and six months after completion. The surveys contained multiple choice, five-point Likert scale, and free text items. Additionally, after completing the program, two mentees participated in in-person interviews, while six others took part in a virtual focus group.

Of the 32 mentees and 27 mentors who responded to the survey distributed at completion of the program, 30 (94%) mentees and 23 (85%) mentors reported that their assigned mentor or mentee was a good match while 18 (56%) mentees and 14 (52%) mentors planned to continue their relationships after the program. Nineteen (59%) of mentees were able to connect with faculty outside of their assigned mentor during the program, indicating that this program helped mentees connect with other potential mentors.

Participation in the program had a substantial impact on trainees' interest in and continued pursuit of classical hematology. Most mentees reported that the program improved their confidence in pursuing classical hematology as a career (78%), facilitated career development (78%), and/or had a positive impact on their sense of professional identity (88%).

Further, 20 (63%) mentees participated in optional scholarly projects with their mentors, with many reporting that the experience afforded them opportunities to obtain awards and grants, present at conferences, and secure academic faculty positions.

"This study shows that effective, deliberate mentorship is vital for [career advancement](#), especially for trainees," said Zoya Qureshy, MD, a current internal medicine chief resident at UC San Diego and study co-author.

"Virtual communication can foster strong external mentorships and relationships for those who might not have as much institutional, local mentorship readily available."

Mentors also positively received the program. Twenty-five (93%) mentor survey respondents thought the [pilot program](#) was a good resource for their mentee, 26 (96%) felt the program contributed to their trainee's [career development](#), and 100% believed the program would increase retention in classical hematology.

"The success of this pilot program could show other subspecialties that it is feasible to have mentorship opportunities outside of one's own institution," said Dr. Park. "It opens up possibilities of reaching out to trainees earlier on in their training or even to those pursuing a Ph.D."

The study did have some limitations, including that feedback from mentors and mentees, which was neither obligatory nor collected anonymously, may have been vulnerable to self-reporting and/or sampling bias. Additionally, participating mentees may have been self-selecting, as most had prior classical hematology mentoring and research experiences, and some had previously received ASH awards. The study sample size was also relatively small.

Drs. Park and Qureshy are currently working in partnership with ASH to expand the mentorship program through ASH's Classical Hematology Advancement Mentorship Program (CHAMP), which will connect fellows interested in classical hematology with mentors. CHAMP will open for mentor and mentee applications in Fall 2024.

**More information:** *Blood Advances* (2024).  
[ashpublications.org/bloodadvan ... dadvances.2024013218](https://ashpublications.org/bloodadvances/2024013218)

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