What is mentoring?
Mentoring involves multiple roles depending on the needs of the mentee (the person being mentored). It includes some or all of the following:

- a mutual relationship where participants share experiences, knowledge and information
- a developmental process where the mentee grows in skills, knowledge and confidence
- a strategy to share intellectual and other resources
- informal or formal support by a more experienced and skilled person
- guided learning by the mentor
- traditionally a one-to-one relationship but group mentoring may be a beneficial option.

Who needs mentoring?
Just about everyone, but usually someone new to the field. Mentors also need mentoring.

What does a mentor do?
A mentor:
- supports and encourages
- is interested in the mentee
- listens actively
- shares skills, knowledge and experience
- provides insight
- is available, open, respectful, accepting, willing to share and learn
- gives guidance and constructive feedback
- assists with career planning
- motivates by setting example
- promotes the development of contacts and networks
- advocates for the mentee.

What does a mentee do?
A mentee:
- enters into a relationship or agreement and develops explicit outcomes and objectives
- meets with mentor (preferably face to face)
- initiates meetings and demonstrates commitment.

Features of a good mentoring relationship
In a good mentoring relationship:
- the mentor and mentee have shared interests and values
- both mentor and mentee have a clear shared understanding of what their mentoring relationship will provide and how this will be done
- mentors are interested in the mentee’s progress
- the mentee feels accepted
- mentees trust their mentor and values their input
- a mentoring agreement is reached that is flexible and suits both mentor and mentee
- protected time is provided to support the mentoring process
- goals are set by both parties that are reviewed regularly in order to monitor progress
- mentoring is supported by the organisation.

Benefits of mentoring
Mentor:
- Opportunity to share one’s experience and wisdom
- enhances communication and leadership skills
- supports ongoing learning and growth in the field
- provides high levels of personal satisfaction
- encourages reflective practice
- contributes towards succession planning and workforce retention.
Mentee:
- Increases skills and knowledge
- receives support for setting and achieving goals
- increases confidence and self-esteem
- extends networks and support systems
- improves communication skills
- expands vision
- reduces isolation
- promotes career advancement.

Organisation:
- Increases professional development and organisational capacity
- enhances organisational culture and image
- recognises values of individual contributions
- increases ability to attract and retain people
- seen as a leadership organisation
- provides support networks
- retains corporate knowledge.

How is it different from supervision?
- Mentoring does not involve assessment, supervision does.
- There is an equality in the relationship which separates it from a supervisory relationship. The mentor may be more experienced but is not necessarily in a supervisory capacity or higher academic level.
- Mentoring relationships may exist for various periods of time from a few weeks up to years depending on mentee needs.
- Mentoring may be independent of the workplace.
- Mentoring is self-paced.

Finding a mentor?
Identify what is required from mentoring and who would be the best mentor to achieve this. Approach is usually by the mentee (self selection).

PHCRED has a networking function to assist with this process. Contact local PHCRED university departments (http://www.phcris.org.au/phcred/contacts.php) or view primary health care researcher profiles at http://www.phcris.org.au/roar/

Universities, professional and employing organisations may provide contacts to approach.

Resources