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Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors

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The *Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors* is intended to initiate discussions at the local and national levels about the postdoctoral appointee-mentor relationship and the commitments necessary for a high quality postdoctoral training experience.

The Compact was drafted by the AAMC Group on Graduate, Research, Education, and Training (GREAT) and its Postdoctorate Committee. It is modeled on the AAMC *Compact Between Resident Physicians and Their Teachers*, available at www.aamc.org/residentcompact. Input on the document was received from the GREAT Group Representatives, members of the AAMC governance, and other members of the postdoctoral community, including the National Postdoctoral Association. At its October 8, 2006, annual business meeting, the GREAT Group unanimously endorsed the document. The document was subsequently endorsed by the AAMC Executive Committee on October 20, 2006.

The Compact is available on the AAMC Web site at www.aamc.org/postdoccompact

Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors

Postdoctoral training is an integral component of the preparation of scientists for career advancement as scientific professionals. Postdoctoral appointees typically join an institution to further their training in a chosen discipline after recently obtaining their terminal degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., D.V.M.). This training is conducted in an apprenticeship mode where she/he works under the supervision of an investigator who is qualified to fulfill the responsibilities of a mentor. The postdoctoral appointee may undertake scholarship, research, service, and teaching activities that together provide a training experience essential for career advancement.

Core Tenets of Postdoctoral Training

Institutional Commitment

Institutions that train postdoctoral appointees must be committed to maintaining the highest standards of training and to providing a program sufficient to ensure, that when completed, the trainee can function independently as a scientific professional. Institutional oversight must be provided for terms of appointment, salary, benefits, grievance procedures, and other matters relevant to the support of postdoctoral appointees. A responsible institutional official must be designated to provide this oversight, and a suitable office should be available for the administrative support of postdoctoral affairs.

Quality Postdoctoral Training

Individuals should be trained to independently formulate meaningful hypotheses, design and conduct interpretable experiments, adhere to good laboratory practices, analyze results critically, understand the broad significance of their research findings, and uphold the highest ethical standards in research. The development of additional skills—including oral and written communication, grant writing, and laboratory management—are considered integral to this training.

Importance of Mentoring in Postdoctoral Training

Effective mentoring is critical for postdoctoral training and requires that the primary mentor dedicate substantial time to ensure personal and professional development. A good mentor builds a relationship with the trainee that is characterized by mutual respect and understanding. Attributes of a good mentor include being approachable, available, and willing to share his/her knowledge; listening effectively; providing encouragement and constructive criticism; and offering expertise and guidance.

Foster Breadth and Flexibility in Career Choices

Postdoctoral appointees must have training experiences of sufficient breadth to ensure that they are prepared to pursue a wide range of professional career options. Effective and regular career guidance is essential and should be provided by the mentor and the institution.

Commitments of Postdoctoral Appointees

- **I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the development of my own career.** I recognize that I must take a realistic look at career opportunities and follow a path that matches my individual skills, values, and interests.
- **I will develop a mutually defined research project with my mentor that includes well-defined goals and timelines.** Ideally, this project should be outlined and agreed upon at the time of the initial appointment.
- **I will perform my research activities conscientiously, maintain good research records, and catalog and maintain all tangible research materials that result from the research project.**
- **I will respect all ethical standards when conducting my research including compliance with all institutional and federal regulations as they relate to responsible conduct in research, privacy and human subjects research, animal care and use, laboratory safety, and use of radioisotopes.** I recognize that this commitment includes asking for guidance when presented with ethical or compliance uncertainties and reporting on breeches of ethical or compliance standards by me and/or others.
- **I will show respect for and will work collegially with my coworkers, support staff, and other individuals with whom I interact.**
- **I will endeavor to assume progressive responsibility and management of my research project(s) as it matures.** I recognize that assuming responsibility for the conduct of research projects is a critical step on the path to independence.
- **I will seek regular feedback on my performance and ask for a formal evaluation at least annually.**
- **I will have open and timely discussions with my mentor concerning the dissemination of research findings and the distribution of research materials to third parties.**
- **I recognize that I have embarked on a career requiring "lifelong learning."** To meet this obligation I must stay abreast of the latest developments in my specialized field through reading the literature, regular attendance at relevant seminar series, and attendance at scientific meetings.
- **I will actively seek opportunities outside the laboratory (e.g. professional development seminars and workshops in oral communication, scientific writing, and teaching) to develop the full set of professional skills necessary to be successful for my chosen career.**
- **At the end of my appointment, in accordance with institutional policy, I will leave behind all original notebooks, computerized files, and tangible research materials so that other individuals can carry on related research. I will also work with my mentor to submit the research results for publication in a timely manner.** I can make copies of my notebooks and computerized files, and have access to tangible research materials which I helped to generate during my postdoctoral appointment according to institutional policy.

Commitments of Mentors

- **I acknowledge that the postdoctoral period is a time of advanced training intended to develop the skills needed to promote the career of the postdoctoral appointee.**

- **I will ensure that a mutually agreed upon set of expectations and goals are in place at the outset of the postdoctoral training period, and I will work with the postdoctoral appointee to create an individual career development plan.**

- **I will strive to maintain a relationship with the postdoctoral appointee that is based on trust and mutual respect.** I acknowledge that open communication and periodic formal performance reviews, conducted at least annually, will help ensure that the expectations of both parties are met.

- **I will promote all ethical standards for conducting research including compliance with all institutional and federal regulations as they relate to responsible conduct in research, privacy and human subjects research, animal care and use, laboratory safety, and use of radioisotopes.** I will clearly define expectations for conduct of research in my lab and make myself available to discuss ethical concerns as they arise.

- **I will ensure that the postdoctoral appointee has sufficient opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to become an expert in an agreed upon area of investigation.**

- **I will provide the appointee with the required guidance and mentoring, and will seek the assistance of other faculty and departmental/institutional resources when necessary.** Although I am expected to provide guidance and education in technical areas, I recognize that I must also educate the postdoctoral appointee by example and by providing access to formal opportunities/programs in complementary areas necessary for a successful career.

- **I will provide a training environment that is suited to the individual needs of the postdoctoral appointee in order to ensure his/her personal and professional growth.** I will encourage a progressive increase in the level of responsibility and independence to facilitate the transition to a fully independent career.

- **I will encourage the interaction of the postdoctoral appointee with fellow scientists both intra- and extramurally and encourage the appointee's attendance at professional meetings to network and present research findings.**

- **I will ensure that the research performed by a postdoctoral appointee is submitted for publication in a timely manner and that she/he receives appropriate credit for the work she/he performs. I will acknowledge her/his contribution to the development of any intellectual property and will clearly define future access to tangible research materials according to institutional policy.**

- **I recognize that there are multiple career options available for a postdoctoral appointee and will provide assistance in exploring appropriate options.** I recognize that not all postdoctoral appointees will become academic faculty. To prepare a postdoctoral appointee for other career paths, I will direct her/him to the resources that explore non-academic careers, and discuss these options.

- **I will commit to being a supportive colleague to postdoctoral appointees as they transition the next stage of their career and to the extent possible, throughout their professional life.** I recognize that the role of a mentor continues after the formal training period.

This compact serves both as a pledge and a reminder to mentors and their postdoctoral appointees that their conduct in fulfilling their commitments to one another should reflect the highest professional standards and mutual respect.

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