

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM A STUDENT?

Three researchers at Sunnybrook Research Institute offer insight on how mentoring the next generation of medical scientists has had an impact on their lives.

Dr. Isabelle Aubert

Scientist

Brain Sciences Research Program

Assistant Professor, University of Toronto

Students are the driving force of research, transforming ideas into experimental realities and discoveries. It is fun, stimulating and rewarding to work with them. They are also among the best teachers, when we are open to listening to them. As a scientist and mentor, I want to provide a stimulating and positive environment so that the students can be in the “zone” and feel encouraged to bring their brilliant ideas forward and make them become reality. I often tell students this quote from Shunryu Suzuki: “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s mind there are few.” I’ve learned from students that we should all work on rediscovering (if we have lost it!) our beginner’s mind, so that we can see things anew, and see the many possibilities on our path to discovery. Hopefully, students are learning as much from me as I am learning from them. Each one of them is contributing to make me become a better scientist and a better mentor. Thanks to all!

Dr. Robert Jankov

Neonatologist and Scientist

Women and Babies Research Program

Associate Professor, University of Toronto

I have been fortunate to have a number of wonderfully bright summer students come through my lab, each of whom has brought a unique set of skills and perspectives. Seeing the occasional “light bulb moment” when explaining a concept is incredibly satisfying; that said, oftentimes the students learn more from each other than from me. I’ve

learned how important it is to listen as well as explain; questions posed from a “naïve” viewpoint have led to interesting new experiments and directions in research that I had never considered. Finally, having derived great satisfaction and pride in watching students advance their own careers after leaving the lab, I’ve also learned how fulfilling it is to be a mentor and not just a supervisor.

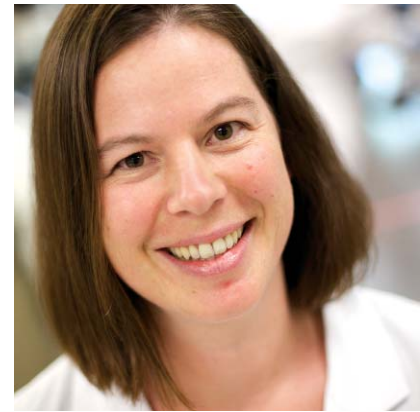
Dr. Robert Nam

Urologist and Associate Scientist

Odette Cancer Research Program

Assistant Professor, University of Toronto

I have the privilege of supervising many students, from the undergraduate to post-graduate levels, at the patient’s bedside, in the operating room and in my lab. My most striking observation has been the extreme diversity in their backgrounds, including educational, cultural and personal learning abilities. The last has been the most challenging. The same approach in teaching one student does not necessarily apply to another. The patience and persistence I have acquired from these experiences have helped me develop more maturely as a person, husband and father. One of the most rewarding experiences has been to train and mentor students to the level of a fully licensed academic urologist— including how to teach someone not only to take out a prostate, but also to analyze its tumour DNA for posterity. These “high-engine” students challenge me in terms of offering state-of-the-art approaches and treatments for urologic diseases. They can also provide insights into research that I had not considered before. This quid pro quo makes teaching and mentoring a truly rewarding experience.



TOP TO BOTTOM:
DR. ISABELLE AUBERT; DR. ROBERT JANKOV



DR. ROBERT NAM