

ISH2024 IN REVIEW

The speed mentoring fostered immediate connections and set the groundwork for long-term mentorship opportunities



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Zitandile Mfono, an emerging researcher writes about her experience of the Speed Mentoring session she attended at ISH2024.

Before attending the ISH Congress in Cartagena, I received an email invitation to sign up for a speed mentoring session during the conference. Eagerly accepting, I saw this as a unique chance to engage with prominent speakers and leading public health researchers specializing in hypertension—a field that aligns closely with my research interests. Coming from a background in nutrition and dietetics, my work focuses on lifestyle interventions for better hypertension management. Therefore, meeting experienced researchers in this area was an exciting prospect.

During the speed mentoring session, I was pleased to discover that one of my mentors was a fellow South African researcher. This mentor shared their journey of establishing a career in hypertension research, emphasizing the role mentorship had played in their own success. Their experiences resonated deeply with me, reaffirming the value of mentorship in navigating the often-challenging world of research. Additionally, I connected with other early-career researchers from various countries, including a colleague from Mexico now based in the United States, who, like me, is working in nutrition and dietetics. Through these interactions, I realized that emerging researchers across borders often face similar challenges: securing funding, finding suitable mentors, and forming meaningful collaborations.

We also discussed the common feeling of “imposter syndrome” among early-career researchers, a theme that emerged frequently

in our conversations. Sharing these experiences with my peers and hearing others articulate similar struggles helped me feel more connected and less isolated in my journey. The one-on-one interactions throughout the session boosted my confidence and strengthened my engagement in the conference. One mentor mentioned a valuable piece of advice that stuck with me: experienced researchers are human too. We shouldn't hesitate to approach them, ask questions, or even seek out potential mentors. They encouraged us to seek mentors whose careers and research trajectories are not only inspirational but also strategically aligned with our professional goals. An experienced mentor, they emphasized, can help early-career researchers avoid common pitfalls and make better-informed decisions.

The speed mentoring session added a personal touch to the event, making it feel more engaging and accessible—particularly valuable since I attended alone. This setting offered an avenue for networking that extended beyond casual interactions, helping me build relationships that might not have developed otherwise. Following the advice from one of my mentors, I decided to approach a potential mentor in my field, and I successfully arranged a follow-up meeting after the conference. This step felt significant and empowering, representing a proactive move toward establishing a long-term mentorship.

Reflecting on this experience, I'm grateful for the Capacity Building Network initiative, which made this level of engagement possible. Without the additional support from this program, I may not have had the opportunity to interact as freely with these experienced researchers or to gain such invaluable insights. The speed mentoring session ultimately fostered both immediate connections and set the groundwork for long-term mentorship opportunities, underscoring its meaningful impact on my professional growth. It was a pivotal experience that not only enhanced my confidence but also equipped me with a clearer perspective on my path forward in hypertension research.

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