

Interview with First Recipients of AAAP Excellence in Mentorship Award

The AAAP Development Committee is pleased to announce a new initiative to fully fund the AAAP Excellence in Mentorship Award. The AAAP Excellence in Mentorship Award was initiated in 2019 and is given to a member of the AAAP who has demonstrated a passion for mentoring students and/or fellow colleagues. We invite all AAAP members to make a donation to the AAAP Excellence in Mentorship Award in honor of, or in memory of your mentor(s)! Simply go to www.aaap.info/foundation and donate to the Excellence in Mentorship Award. Then, specify the name of the mentor(s) your donation is made in honor (or in memory) of. This is a great way to honor and thank your mentors! In addition, all donations are tax deductible and will count towards your cumulative donations for inclusion in the AAAP Guilds.

We recently interviewed **Dr. Patricia Wakenell** and **Dr. Mark Bland**, the first two recipients of the AAAP Excellence in Mentorship Award, to ask them about mentorship.

AAAP: Dr. Wakenell, how have you benefitted from being a mentor?

Dr. Wakenell: Being a mentor has been my joy and passion. I have learned so much from my students, and each one has made me a better person. Being a mentor has meant for me suffering the disappointments and tragedies, as well as the joys of my mentees. No number of publications, promotions or awards (except for the mentorship one) is as fulfilling for me as watching my mentees succeed. I am a better parent, professor and veterinarian because of my students. Some of my former students are graying and getting close to retirement now, but are still in touch, and I am delighting in their success. When I graduated as a veterinarian, I never saw myself as a teacher or mentor (or parent for that matter!). I am so grateful that due to my mentors, I was able to find my career and my passion. At least for me, I don't see my research / publications really changing the world for the better as much as I see my "flock" of former students doing amazing things that I could never have accomplished on my own.

AAAP: Who were your mentors?

Dr. Wakenell: I had 4 exceptional mentors over my career. The first was Dr. Ken McKersie, a small animal practitioner and owner of Dearborn Heights Animal Hospital, Dearborn Heights, MI. I had changed positions from an off track race-track hospital in MA, a terrible experience with an unethical employer, and couldn't figure out what to do next. I took a temporary position with Ken, and then stayed even after starting my pathology residency at MSU. Ken mentored me both personally and career wise and treated me with utmost respect and kindness. He helped me define better what I liked about veterinary medicine and what I could not tolerate. He allowed me to work on Saturdays during my residency both to help me stay afloat financially and to maintain contact with my clients. Ken passed away late in my residency program.

In my residency and doctoral programs, my 2 major professors (I was too much for one to handle...), Dr. Jagdev Sharma and Dr. Janver Krehbiel were and still are my mentors. MSU did not allow pathology residents to do doctoral work during the pathology residency. When the opportunity to work with Jagdev became available during my residency, Jan made the exception for me. This showed me that flexibility and doing what is best for your mentee are more important than strict "rules". During this time my father passed away and I was so filled with grief that I asked to withdraw from the programs. Both Jan and Jagdev told me to take whatever time that I needed and would not let me withdraw. They saw in me an ability that I couldn't see myself, and understood that a few months of down time in a 40+ year career means nothing. I returned after a month. When I unexpectedly became pregnant during the end of my Ph.D., they helped me finish both financially and emotionally. Now they are mentoring me on retirement!

Finally, my first boss after graduating from my doctoral program was Mr. Bob Cassler at CEVA, then Sanofi Animal Health. I was pretty naive about running a vaccine development laboratory and Bob guided me with both kindness and practical advice. Bob taught me to not overestimate what I could do in a specific time period ("always add 6 months to how long you think it will take you to develop a vaccine") and how to protect myself in a volatile business. I'm still learning these lessons. Bob passed away during my tenure there, and I still miss him.

AAAP: Dr. Bland, what does mentorship mean to you?

Dr. Bland: Going the extra mile for students. Providing an environment that allows students to practice hands on and do everything you get to do. Setting an example. Giving students and clients the opportunity to think when problem solving, team work, advice. Exposing students to the different types of poultry, poultry environments, and different types of companies that make up the Poultry Industry. Challenging students to think outside the box (school vs. real world). Helping students to avoid mistakes made by me in my early years.

AAAP: Who were your mentors?

Dr. Bland: Elizabeth Livermore; my grandmother Introduced me to the world of poultry (layers, broilers, ducks) at an early age of 7

Jerry Booth; FFA High School Ag Advisor / Hillsboro OR High School

Dr. George Arscott; Poultry Science Department Head, Oregon State University

Dr. H. Nakau; Poultry Science Professor, Oregon State University. Went out of his way to make sure I stayed focused on Veterinary School. Helped me get my first preceptorship with Salisbury Labs in Charles City, Iowa

Dr. Don Helfer; Poultry Veterinary Diagnostician, Oregon State University School of Veterinary Medicine. My first introduction to a poultry veterinarian.

Dr. Bill Wigle; Roll-o-dex, contact information for all my future preceptorships, Salisbury Chicken School

Dr. Don Zander; H & N Layer Breeders

Dr. Yan Ghazikhanian; Nicholas Turkey Breeders, world famous turkey veterinarian. He taught me how to deal with corporate politics, research, turkey production and medicine. Pushed me to present at various Poultry Industry meetings around the country, introduced me to Salmonella, Fowl cholera and Erysipelas and other poultry diseases. Helped me "Fail Safely" and learn from the experience.

Dr. Gregg Cutler; Cutler Associates, introduced me to the world of consulting.

AAAP: You have a lot of mentors! How have you benefitted from mentorship during your career?

Dr. Bland: I am where I am today as a veterinarian in poultry medicine, because of the above named persons going out of their way (literally) to involve themselves in my professional and personal life.