



Case: Mentoring Leadership in Your Career

Key Phrases:

- Advocating for your mentee
- Encouraging mentee independence
- Authorship expectations in a mentoring relationship

The Situation:

Lisa is a productive Assistant Professor in your department. Her technical/research mentor is Charles, a departmental professor and senior investigator who has a large and very productive lab in which Lisa works. Charles was crucially involved in the design and initiation of a large multicenter NIH funded clinical trial for which the hospital is one of the subcontracted clinical sites and he is the site PI. Charles initially makes another faculty member the site director who oversees the subcontract and the clinic where the trial occurs, but early in the trial some issues arose with the initial site director and Charles asked Lisa to take over the operations of the subcontract. Lisa eagerly accepted this opportunity and rapidly became intimately involved in the study, assuming primary responsibility for supervision of the study coordinators, IRB issues and day to day operation of the study. Over the next few years she also took on increasing responsibility and visibility within the study locally and nationally and became the named overall PI for the Boston site as well as its site director. After five years the study was renewed by NIH, and, while follow-up is still ongoing, data from the earlier intervention part of the study is now available to the study sites for potential ancillary analyses and publications. As site director, Lisa is supposed to sign off on all ancillary study proposals and publication proposals prior to submission to the multisite study's Data Coordinating Center (DCC) and Steering Committee for final approval.

Alongside the main protocol, Charles has developed a robust genetics ancillary study that is well integrated into the overall study. Because of this he remains well connected with the study, the DCC and the Steering Committee. Lisa, whose research interests do not center on genetics, runs the clinical aspects of the study and Charles runs the genetics lab. There are weekly genetics lab meetings where topics related to this study as well as other genetic studies going on in the lab are discussed, but Lisa does not attend these lab meetings.



A year later Lisa becomes aware that publication proposals she has not previously seen using the clinical, non-genetic analyses, data have been submitted to the DCC for approval. These publication proposals were not discussed with her prior to submission and she did not sign off on them. When she meets with Charles to discuss this, he states that ideas for potential analyses come up at the weekly genetics lab meetings and since Lisa does not attend those meetings, he forgot to include her in the discussions. Because the DCC knows Charles so well, they never question when he signs off on a publication proposal despite the fact he is no longer officially the site PI or site director. Charles apologizes to Lisa and they agree that non-genetic proposals will be directed to her and genetic analyses will be directed to him.

Lisa is working on a particular analysis that Charles is aware of and provides input on. Around the time Lisa is completing work on the manuscript about this analysis, she becomes aware of ongoing work by another mid-level investigator, whose primary involvement in the study has been genetic analyses. This second investigator is working with a fellow on an analysis based only on the study's clinical, not genetic, data which will overlap significantly with the analysis that Lisa has completed. She also learns that the fellow is counting on this first author publication for his K application, and that the publication proposal for the second investigator and fellow's study was signed off by Charles when submitted to the DCC. Clearly both analyses cannot be published. In addition, Charles, a full professor with a very large number of publications, still remains an author on the majority of publications (clinical and genetic) that come out of the study, often as senior author.

Case Questions:

1. **If you are Charles, Lisa's technical/research mentor,**
 - a. How could you have prevented some of the current problems?
 - b. What would you do now?
2. **If you are Lisa's developmental mentor,**
 - a. How would you advise her to further advocate for her inclusion in all discussions about the use of the study data for non-genetic analyses?
 - b. How might she resolve the issue related to the two overlapping publications with Charles, while minimizing harm to the fellow, the second investigator, and both of them?



- c. How would you recommend Lisa proceed in order to get out from under Charles shadow, since you know that investigator “independence” is required by the HMS Promotions Committee for advancement to Associate Professor?
3. **Who should initiate**, and how should a conversation take place with the fellows and other mid-level investigators involved in the projects? Should the decisions regarding the publications be made at Charles and Lisa’s level prior to meeting with the others?
4. If a mid-level investigator approaches Lisa to work on a genetics-based study, citing that he/she does not want to work with Charles, how should she, as site PI, this be discuss/resolve this?
5. If the second investigator and fellow on the competing clinical study are from another institution, and have made substantive contributions to the subject database, does this change the dynamics/outcome?