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John, for those of us fortunate to work with you or to be trained by you, we are deeply grateful for your mentorship. On behalf of patients, physicians, and scientists, we are grateful for your contributions to the field of calcium metabolism. Congratulations on receiving the Kober Medal. I now present to you Dr. John T. Potts Jr.

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Acceptance of the 2013 Association of American Physicians George M. Kober Medal

Acceptance remarks

John T. Potts Jr.

Larry Jameson suggested I might make some personal reflections as well as expressing my thanks to those who made this delightful occasion possible.

Conflict of interest: The author has declared that no conflict of interest exists.

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This article is adapted from a presentation at the ASCI/AAP Joint Meeting, April 28, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

Members of the AAP are traditionally physicians, but physicians in an academic medical center where there are multiple missions in which they are involved, including, of course patient care, but also teaching and biomedical research across the full spectrum from basic work to translational medicine applications and the newer fields of health services and policy. These environments by the nature of these multiple roles emphasize the interdependence of the physicians and the increasingly large number of Ph.D. scientists and the numerous younger trainees.

I have enjoyed my many years at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School (HMS), which span a total of 56 years from when I first came as an intern. Actually I have had only 48 years of continuous service at the MGH (having had the good fortune to spend eight years at the NIH — in the
Supplement

That, then your role is to knock on a few metaphorical doors and/or point to some possible pathways for support or opportunities that they may not have been aware of; it is critical to follow up and keep in touch.

It is overwhelmingly clear to me that 99-plus percent of the effort involved in the development of a successful career comes from the individual, not the mentor. On the other hand, the feedback that I have often received directly or through letters related to awards speaks poignantly of the effect of mentors on those advised. If it is so important to them, perhaps we underestimate what our role can mean, particularly in this time of unusual stress in academic medical centers due to tightened resources. Such support from us can be critical to encourage our younger colleagues to stay in the field of academic medical science, helping thereby to preserve the remarkable dynamic revolution in biology that has ushered in so much progress.

The theme of personal reflection I wanted to spend a few minutes on is the importance of what is termed mentoring. Mentoring is not a perfect phrase by any means. What I’m speaking about is helping others in our field whom we meet and interact with. It has always impressed me that the mentor doesn’t do all that much. What is critical is to listen and carefully deduce what the colleague with whom you’re speaking wants, not what you may prefer them to do. Once you understand that, then your role is to knock on a few metaphorical doors and/or point to some possible pathways for support or opportunities that they may not have been aware of; it is critical to follow up and keep in touch.

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