STS Career Development Task Force
2024 TweetChat on
So, You Want To Become
A Program Director
Moderated by Dr. Mara Antonoff
Each quarter, the STS Career Development Communications Task Force hosts a TweetChat on topics important to early career cardiothoracic surgeons. It’s an opportunity for Task Force members to connect directly with early career surgeons and share insights in real time.

What follows is a recap of the TweetChat on So, You Want To Be a Program Director, moderated by Dr. Mara Antonoff in May 2024. Opinions expressed in this chat are those of its contributors and don’t necessarily reflect the views of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons.

STS Career Development Task Force members participated in the discussion, which reached more than 1.9 million people.
Welcome to the #CTCareers Chat, brought to you by the @STS_CTSurgery Career Development Workforce! Tonight, we’ll discuss considerations of becoming a Program Director. Follow @TheHub_STS for ongoing information from this WF and check out our website sts.org/early-career-h..

Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS @maraantonoff · May 23
I’m your moderator @maraantonoff. I’m a thoracic surgeon at @MDAndersonNews and Program Director of Education for our traditional 2-yr & 4-3 training programs. #CTCareers
T1: What’s the difference between being an educator and having an education-focused career?
Robert Van Haren, MD @rvanharen · May 23
T1 most surgeons teach students as part of their job in the OR and clinic. The distinction is getting involved in leadership and administration roles that are focused on education #CTCareers

Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS @maraantonoff · May 23
T1: From my perspective, this means directing your research and leadership pathways toward education, beyond simply participating as a teacher or instructor. It becomes more about your career than just those you teach. #CTCareers

Robert Van Haren, MD @rvanharen · May 23
Replying to @maraantonoff
T1: I agree! One way of thinking of it is moving from teacher to principal #ctcareers

Brian Mitzman, MD MS FACS @BrianMitzman · May 23
T1: totally agree with @rvanharen. Most surgeons teach and are educators. Having an education focused career means formal leadership or education research to advance the field #CTCareers
We are all educators. As a surgeon you have things to teach Students, Residents, fellows, PAs, OR nurses. Opportunity to teach every day even if you don’t have an education focused career.

T1: educators work on mastering teaching. Education-focused is about the entire construct of knowledge transmission, retention and application.

Prabhas Tej @ImPrabhasTej · May 23
Like the “Guru” perfect!

Lyndon Walsh @LyndonCWalsh · May 23
Replies to @maraantonoff @TomVargheseJr and 7 others
T1 From a student’s perspective, there are a lot of educators but individuals with education-focused careers have invested extra time into learning how to improve their teaching and effectively connect with/guide students. Emphasis on the last part! #CTCareers
T2: What are the job expectations of a program director?
Early Career Journey

Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS @maraantonoff · May 23
T2: PDs have authority and accountability for the day-to-day functionality of the training program, including didactics, rotation schedules, educational objectives, trainee wellness, mentorship, support, conduct of program evaluation... #CTCareers

Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS @maraantonoff · May 23
T2: PDs are responsible for implementing strategies for compliance with ACGME rules, including trainee recruitment, supervision, evaluation, promotion, duty hours, and responding to directives from multiple governing bodies. What else? #CTCareers

Joseph D. Phillips, MD FACS @jdphillipsMD · May 23
Replying to @maraantonoff
A2. #1 be an advocate for the residents! #CTCareers

Brian Mitzman, MD MS FACS @BrianMitzman · May 23
T2: I think the key word is accountability. Regardless of who the other educators are, the formal training and outcomes fall on your shoulders. #CTCareers
Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS  @maraantonoff  ·  May 23

Here’s the bigger part of question T2: What are the “unofficial” roles of PDs— that may not be written in the common program requirements, but tend to fall in their laps. What examples have you seen???? #CTCareers

Olugbenga Okusanya MD  @okusanyamd  ·  May 23

T2. I think the pd sets a big part of the culture of the program. How the trainees relate to the faculty and vice versa. #ctcareers

Crystal Zhang, MD, MPH  @CrystalZhangMD  ·  May 23

This really resonates~ #CTCareers

Olugbenga Okusanya MD  @okusanyamd  ·  May 23

Replying to @maraantonoff
T2 A great PD feels like an involved parent. Clearly an authority figure but has your best at heart. #ctcareers
Jonathan Spicer MD PhD @DoctorJSpicer · May 23
Replying to @maraantonoff @TomVargheseJr and 7 others
I wish I knew! But it definitely has something to do with how much time and energy one commits to helping others learn.

Panos N. Vardas @pannvar · May 23
Resolution of conflict between senior and junior residents, remediation and assistance of rebuilding a broken relationship between a faculty and a resident, assistance with hardship (family, financial, etc) to name few.
#CTCareers

Mike Eisenberg @DrMikeEisenberg · May 23
Replying to @maraantonoff
T2: PDs have unique insight to difficulties trainees experience (training, family, financial, etc) and ability to mentor/guide in ways that their peers in the department cannot. #CTCareers

Prabhas Tej @ImPrabhasTej · May 23
100% agree! IMO mentorship is the pivotal for successful legacy!
**Robert Van Haren, MD @rvanharen · May 23**

A2 PDs are responsible for running a educational program that produces fully trained Cardiothoracic surgeons that are ready for independent practice and care of patients #ctcareers

2 1 4 855

**Busra Cangut, MD, MS @BusraCangutMD · May 23**

T2: From a resident standpoint, PDs often take on several unofficial roles that are crucial for the functioning and morale of a residency program such as conflict mediator, mediate conflicts between residents, attendings, and other healthcare staff. #CTCareers #CTsurgery #MedEd

1 3 6 881

**Ziad Awad, MD, FACS @ziadtawad · May 23**

Shouldn’t this be the norm practice for any speciality?

1 1 91
T3: What might be the stepping stones to becoming the next PD?
**EARLY CAREER JOURNEY**

**Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS @maraantonoff · May 23**
T3 response: IMHO, lots of ways at local, national, and career development level. Locally, take accountability for aspects of the curriculum or get involved in educators groups. #CTCareers @STS_CTsurgery @TheHub_STS

**Busra Cangut, MD, MS @BusraCangutMD · May 23**
Replies to @maraantonoff
T3: Advocating for residents wellness, showing a commitment to resident well-being by developing and supporting wellness initiatives. #CTCareers #CTsurgery #MedEd #SoMe

**Panos N. Vardas @panvar · May 23**
Replies to @maraantonoff and @TheHub_STS
Resolution of conflict between senior and junior residents, remediation and assistance of rebuilding a broken relationship between a faculty and a resident, assistance with hardship (family, financial, etc.) to name few. #CTCareers

**Frin A Gillaspie, MD, MPH, FACS @FrinGillaspie · May 23**
Replies to @CrystalZhangMD @APDSurgery and @Surg_Education
T3: Love this! Also it isn’t just education of those junior to you, it’s education of peers, colleagues learning new skills and patients! Education touches everything we do! #CTCareers

**Robert Van Haren, MD @rvanharen · May 23**
Replies to @BusraCangutMD and @maraantonoff
T2 #ctcareers great point! Problem solving, negotiating are huge part of being a PD, there is always something that needs your attention

**Robert Van Haren, MD @rvanharen · May 23**
T3 5 years of practice as faculty is talked about as “requirement” #CTCareers
**EARLY CAREER JOURNEY**

**Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS** @maraantonoff · May 23
T3: You will want to develop your own section of your CV related to education, as well as to track your own Education Portfolio: journals.lww.com/academicmedici... #CTCareers

**Mike Eisenberg** @DrMikeEisenberg · May 23
Replying to @maraantonoff
T3: From a resident's perspective it's easy to see when faculty are overburdened/burnt-out. It's challenging to look after the needs of others if you're running on fumes, so be sure to take time to recharge your batteries! #CTCareers

**Crystal Zhang, MD, MPH** @CrystalZhangMD · May 23
T3 Response: Engaging in education research and being involved in advancing medical education starting with one's own institution. Joining @APDSurgery and @Surg_Education. Involvement in #CTCareers TweetChats like this and connecting with other passionate educators!

**Olugbenga Okusanya MD** @okusanyamd · May 23
Replying to @maraantonoff
T3 Be an APD! Usually low barrier to entry and you can learn a lot for that next step. #ctcareers

**Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS** @maraantonoff · May 23
T3 response: For your own career development, you can do education research. do additional certificates, get involved with @Surg_Education, consider the ASE Surg Educ Research Fellowship (SERF), and participate in tweetchats! #CTCareers
T4: What sets apart the good PDs from the great?
Joseph D. Phillips, MD FACS @jdphillipsMD • May 23

I'M LOOKING FOR PASSION!

T4 Being a human while being an effective administrator which is an incredible balance. Keep the main thing the main thing. What is in the best interest of pedagogy. #ctcareers

Erin A Gillaspie, MD, MPH, FACS @ErinGillaspie • May 23

T4: for me it's personalized education!! Helping you to identify your strengths, weakness and opportunities and then working with you, structuring your program to make you the best you can be!!! I think the other piece is connecting you to people who can help you to develop!!!

Robert Van Haren, MD @rvanharen • May 23

A tough question, trying to figure this out now. I think providing stability in the program and always advocating for trainees #CTCareers
Rajika Jindani, MD, MPH, MS @RajikaJindani · May 23

T4: having empathy! Understanding trainees learn and engage in different ways and structuring the program to be accessible to the current residents. Also, being aware of the residents goals and acting as a sponsor to aid their success! #ctcareers

Mike Eisenberg @DrMikeEisenberg · May 23

Replying to @maraantonoff

T4: The best PDs are organized, action-oriented, and patient. Residents can quickly become disillusioned if a PD doesn't remember any of the details of a meeting they had with them. This is compounded if the moon is promised without action. Lastly, we are all learning. #CTCareers
Time for closing thoughts, fire away! #CTCareers @STS_CTsurgery @TheHub_STS

I feel incredibly privileged to play a role in the lives of my patients. I hope that by training fellows, they will play a huge role in the lives of many more patients. Education amplifies your impact enormously. #CTCareers

There are so many amazing ways to educate! Find one that works for you and that you can devote time/passion into!! For me a joy of my career was as a course director for the medical school!! PD/APD, or clerkship director, just get out there & inspire!! #CTCareers

@CrystalZhangMD teaching starts during our training. Glad to have some of our trainees on the chat #ctcareers
Mara Antonoff, MD, FACS @maraantonoff · May 23
Thank you all for contributing to this fantastic chat! Such great advice. Follow @TheHubSTS and #CTCareers to stay on top of the discussion!
sts.org/career-develop...

GOODNIGHT EVERYONE
A career in education resources available from STS:

• How To Kick Start A Career in Education
• Teaching as an Early Career Surgeon: The View from the Other Side of the Table
• Putting Together an Educator’s Portfolio for Promotion