

ASNR Virtual Mentorship Program Stories: Dr. Benjamin Philip

My name is Benjamin Philip, PhD, and I'm an Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy, Neurology, and Surgery at Washington University in St. Louis. I started my career as a neuroscientist, and when I transitioned into translational research, the American Society for Neurorehabilitation (ASNR) was the perfect home for me. Right now I'm an early career faculty member running a small laboratory that focuses on the brain mechanisms of handedness, the brain consequences of peripheral neurological injury, and how these two intersect to improve rehabilitation for patients with an impaired dominant hand.



When ASNR opened its applications for its first Virtual Mentoring Program in November 2020, I jumped on the opportunity. I was accepted into the program, and by mid-January 2021 the program's organizer, Heidi Schambra, MD, introduced me to my mentor and gave us a meeting structure to build our communications around. Each mentee had quarterly one-on-one Zoom meetings with their mentors, plus two more group meetings with other early-career mentees and their mentors. ASNR laid out some basic helpful expectations for mentors and mentees to ensure smooth meetings. For example, as a mentee, it was my responsibility to email my mentor at least a day before each meeting with 2-4 questions about career plans, academic strategies, or professional skills. Just enough structure that we wouldn't get lost, while still leaving us plenty of freedom for discussion.

The program provided exactly the help I wanted as a junior member of a professional organization. I got a line to a highly experienced mentor (Carolee Winstein, PT, PhD), who shared lots of valuable insights into how to navigate the twists and turns of my career. But the most valuable part wasn't the advice – it was the people. Like many scientists, I am a raging introvert, and meeting new people at conferences can present a huge challenge for me. The isolation of COVID-19 has only made this harder. But when ASNR held its spring 2022 meeting, I came to it knowing my mentor, my fellow mentees, the program organizers, even my fellow mentees' mentors. The Virtual Mentoring Program helped me transition from being a member of ASNR to being part of its community.

If you're looking for an introduction to the community of capable and insightful people who do neurorehabilitation research, I would strongly recommend the Virtual Mentoring Program. It will give you the chance to meet people who will be your friends and colleagues; the people you'll collaborate with, the people you'll get a drink at the hotel bar with, and the people whose eyes you want on your research. The people whom you look up to, and – in time – the people who'll look up to you. You'll also get some great mentoring, of course. But the real benefits are the ones that continue far beyond the program's one-year life cycle.

This year, I'm looking forward to helping to mentor the new class of mentees. I hope I'll get to meet some of you among them!