



HELPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCIENTISTS

Meet Mentor: Vasiliki E. Kalodimou, BSc (Hons), MSc, PhD, CABP(H)

Vasiliki Kalodimou, BSc (Hons), MSc, PhD, CABP(H), is an assistant professor of histology in the School of Medicine at the European University-Cyprus Ltd. Frankfurt Branch; the director at the Flow Cytometry-Research and Regenerative Medicine Department of IASO Maternity-Pediatric and Research Hospital in Athens, Greece; and the cord blood bank director and processing facility director at MedStem-Cryobanks of IASO. She joined AABB in 2008. Her first volunteer experience was as an AABB assessor, followed by committee membership. Eventually, she became a mentor herself and was elected to the AABB Standards Committee.

AABB NEWS: WHY DID YOU WANT TO BECOME A MENTOR?

KALODIMOU: I've been an AABB member since 2008. As the years passed, I became more involved with many AABB activities, such as subsections and assessor teams. When the opportunity to become a mentor through the PEP mentoring program became available, I was thrilled. I thought this would be a perfect fit for me to help young scientists who had just started their career in biotherapies and share knowledge I had gained all these years while working in the field. In addition, I could be there to support, encourage and enable their professional development—something I did not have when I started my career.

AABB NEWS: CAN YOU SHARE THE MENTORSHIP GOALS YOU AND YOUR MENTEE DEVELOPED FOR THE PROGRAM?

KALODIMOU: I've been a mentor since 2017. First, I listen to my mentees' needs and what they want to gain from the program, then we set the goals. Every mentee has different goals and needs, so my role is to help them achieve as much as we can until the end of the mentoring program.

With my current mentee, we set goals to help him better understand the biotherapies field and the possible applications and accreditation needs when it comes to starting a new company in the field, and to get him more involved with AABB activities.

Most of the time I'm working and helping my mentees even after we have finished the program. I try to be there for them when they need my advice. For me, mentorship is a long-lasting relationship, and I can say that I have gained wonderful colleagues/friends throughout the world.

AABB NEWS: YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS INCLUDE MOLECULAR GENETICS, IMMUNOLOGY AND STEM CELLS. HOW DID YOUR CLINICAL EXPERIENCE AND

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND IN REGENERATIVE MEDICINE HELP TO GUIDE AND SUPPORT YOUR MENTEE THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAM?

KALODIMOU: My background and experience gained over the years helps me guide my mentees to avoid mistakes I've made because I did not have any guidance or mentors. I let them see what it takes to be a researcher in the biotherapies field by sharing my experience, and I also help them gain more connections and understand the cellular therapy standards.

For example, my previous mentee was interested in my research, and when COVID-19 started, she asked if we could collaborate to help patients in her country using my current research protocols in stem cells in combination with hers. We did it, and we managed to publish two articles. We also presented our data at two conferences.

As mentors, we need to keep in mind that we need to be there for our mentees, help them, listen to them and make it easy for them because they will be the ones that will continue working in the field. If they have a positive mentoring experience, they will help the next generation of scientists and so on.

AABB NEWS: WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST AS A MENTOR?

KALODIMOU: Helping and sharing my experience in the biotherapies field, especially in flow cytometry, stem cells and regenerative medicine applications, and finding ways to inspire mentees about the biotherapies field to give/find opportunities for developmental experiences for my mentees.

Mentoring helps me develop coaching, leadership and community skills and expand my professional network. It also gives me the opportunity to collaborate, help and exchange ideas with scientists from all over the world. Mentoring is a win-win situation. I want to thank AABB and PEP mentoring program for this opportunity.