

PODCAST MINISERIES BY: RTC AND TDR GLOBAL LAC
**Mentoring as a Tool for Professional Development and Strengthening
Health Research Networks**

EPISODE 6: MENTORSHIP INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Karen Linares (KL): Hello, and welcome to the latest episode of our podcast, *"Mentoring as a Tool for Professional Development and Strengthening Health Research Networks."* Today, we will talk about **institutionalizing research mentorship** and the different models that can be used to facilitate this process and ensure its long-term sustainability.

Before we begin, we would like to introduce our guest, Alejandra Chamorro. She is the Course Portfolio Coordinator at CIDEIM and the leader of the TDR Global Node for Latin America and the Caribbean. She will explain why institutionalizing mentoring is important, and we will discuss existing models for doing so, such as the **HERMES guide**, developed by the Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), and the **MENTOR Model**, developed by Antoinette Oglethorpe.

Alejandra, welcome! It's a pleasure to have you on our podcast. Please tell us a little about yourself and your work.

Alejandra Chamorro (AC): Thank you, Karen. I am a systems engineer with a master's degree in IT and telecommunications management. I have worked at CIDEIM since 2006, and as you mentioned, I currently coordinate the course portfolio and lead the TDR Global node for Latin America and the Caribbean. As part of my work with TDR Global, I have participated in initiatives that promote mentoring. This has included contributing to the development of the HERMES practical guide. HERMES stands for *"Health Research Mentorship in Low- and Middle-Income Countries."* I also participated in the TDR Mentorship Programme, which was led by Antoinette Oglethorpe and supported by TDR, and I contributed to the development of the HERMES 2.0 guide. We have led various training activities from the TDR global node and the Regional Training Center for Latin America and the Caribbean to disseminate these materials and tools learned through TDR-supported programs.

KL: Before diving into the topic of institutionalization, it is important to review what mentoring is since it is often confused with consulting, teaching, or training. How is mentoring different from these processes?

AC: As Antoinette told us in the first episode of this podcast, mentoring involves a broader, more relational dynamic. It's not just about imparting technical knowledge; it's also about guiding, accompanying, and sharing experiences over time.

Courses and training programs have very defined beginnings and ends, but mentoring evolves alongside the individual, helping them overcome obstacles and make better use of their own resources.

KL: What exactly do we mean when we talk about institutionalizing mentoring?

AC: The goal is to formally add a mentorship program to an institution so that it is not only based on individual efforts. Institutionalizing mentoring ensures that it is systematic, sustainable, and aligned with institutional objectives.

Research mentorship is a powerful tool. It has the capacity to shape generations of researchers by positively influencing their career development and **fostering a culture of learning through research, knowledge generation, and communication of findings.**

KL: Now, let's talk about the models that facilitate the formal integration of a mentoring program into an institution. At the beginning of this episode, we mentioned the HERMES guide. Alejandra, could you explain what the HERMES guide proposes and why it is relevant?

AC: The HERMES guide was developed and published in 2022 by TDR, the Special Program for Training and Research in Tropical Diseases. It offers a practical framework for promoting the institutionalization of research mentorship.

The guide defines the institutionalization of research mentorship as **building research capacity within organizations to improve research effectiveness and health equity.** It does not explain how to be a good mentor or mentee because other resources address these topics.

One highlighted aspect is promoting a **"pay-it-forward" culture**, as this approach creates a virtuous circle in which goodwill is transferred through networks. When people receive help, they develop a sense of social obligation and gratitude, making them more willing to help others. A "pay-it-forward" or reciprocity culture increases team solidarity and reduces financial barriers. When you're working with limited resources, this principle is helpful because it optimizes those resources.

Therefore, when establishing a research mentorship program, the guide recommends applying the following basic principles:

- Consider a holistic approach, taking a genuine interest in people's overall well-being and going beyond professional development.
- Recognize research mentorship as an institutional responsibility.
- Adapt to the particular context because there is no single model for institutionalizing research mentorship. So, it's a good idea to adapt the guide to fit the needs of the institution.
- Balance digital with in-person contact.
- Build an institutional culture of mentoring.
- Promote collaboration and integration. One way to do this is through a collaboration system that allows for reverse mentoring, which encourages less experienced or younger colleagues to serve as mentors. This develops leadership skills and self-confidence.
- Promote a pay-it-forward culture.

KL: Now, let's put this into practice. What steps should an institution take to implement a mentorship program?

AC: HERMES proposes four stages, which I will briefly explain, but which are developed in more detail in the guide.

- **Exploration:** Explore existing programs, habits, practices, resources, and possible mentorship initiatives. At this stage, for example, potential mentors and interested mentees are identified.
- **Preparation:** Plan the launch of the mentorship program and define its purpose and goals. Adapt or adopt existing programs within the institution. Then, assign a responsible office and establish a database of mentors.
- **Implementation:** Match mentees with mentors and hold mentorship meetings and training sessions. Monitor and evaluate progress.
- **Sustainability:** Identify areas for improvement and ensure ongoing organizational support. Encourage mentees to become mentors and promote a pay-it-forward culture.

KL: Now, let's talk about the MENTOR model. How did you learn about it, and what does it suggest for the implementation of a mentoring program?

AC: We learned about the MENTOR model developed by Antoinette Oglethorpe during the *TDR Mentorship Programme* we participated in in 2024. The model outlines six clear steps for launching and implementing an effective mentoring program. It is a practical framework that helps to turn intentions into concrete actions:

- **M – Matching Strategy:** Designing the process by which mentors and mentees are paired based on criteria, manual algorithms, and supervision to ensure affinity and institutional value.
- **E – Engagement:** Disseminating information and attracting participants (informative sessions, launch) so people understand the benefits and roles.
- **N – Nominations:** the registration/nomination process (self-nomination or nomination by units) that allows useful data to be gathered for matching.
- **T – Training:** Train mentors and mentees. Evidence shows that programs with initial training are more successful. Here, practical content is designed for mentoring conversations, goals, and boundaries.
- **O – Ongoing Support:** Cultivate communities, facilitate follow-up sessions, and establish support networks to maintain the program's momentum.
- **R – Review:** this refers to monitoring, evaluating, and celebrating in order to learn, adjust, and highlight achievements.

KL: Could you please elaborate on the relationship between the HERMES guide and the MENTOR model?

AC: Both approaches complement each other. **HERMES provides a general framework** of principles and stages for institutionalizing research mentorship, ensuring it becomes part of an institution's strategy.

On the other hand, the **MENTOR model is more practical and operational**; it tells us how to turn ideas into concrete actions within those stages. In the end, it's interesting that, despite their different names and approaches, the models follow universal stages:

- Diagnosis: Understanding the context and needs.
- Preparation: Defining goals, responsibilities, and resources.
- Implementation: Launching the program, matching, training, and providing accompaniment.
- Evaluation: Reviewing, adjusting, and ensuring sustainability.

The combination of HERMES's strategic aspects and MENTOR's operational aspects leads to the creation of more institutionalized and sustainable mentorship programs.

KL: Monitoring or tracking the mentoring program is essential for ensuring its sustainability and integration into the institutional culture. Alejandra, could you share some recommendations for measuring and evaluating research mentorship programs?

AC: The HERMES guide recommends the following:

- Adapt monitoring and evaluation according to the stage of the mentorship program.
- Use quantitative and qualitative methods. Since there are no standardized scales for measuring mentoring programs, it is necessary to adopt a multi-indicator approach and develop our own tools to measure the institutionalization of research mentorship.
- Celebrate achievements within research groups and teams, not just at the individual level.
- Conduct ongoing monitoring and documentation of mentoring activities at different levels (e.g., mentor-mentee, institutional).

KL: Thank you very much for joining us, Alejandra, and for sharing these valuable resources. Before we conclude, what would you say is the most significant impact of institutionalized research mentorship?

AC: Institutionalizing research mentorship has the power to transform both individual careers and institutional capacities. That's why we're encouraging more institutions to take this step.

KL: Thank you to everyone who has followed us throughout this podcast series dedicated to mentoring. We hope the resources we shared help you integrate and formalize mentoring processes individually and within your research institutions. This complete series, with transcripts in English and Spanish, is available on our [YouTube channel](#). You can also access the series on our website: www.cideim.org.co/cideim.

Until next time!