

Mentorship INTERVIEW



TF-YS

Presented by IFCC Young Scientists Task Force

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF. CAVALIER (THE MENTOR) AND DR. ERIC YAYO (THE MENTEE)

Dr. Cavalier is currently Professor of Clinical Chemistry at the University of Liege, Belgium, and the Head of the Department of Clinical Chemistry of the University Hospital of Liège (CHU de Liège). He is also the President of the Royal Belgian Society of Laboratory Medicine, and Chairman of the IFCC Committee on Bone markers. His research topics mainly focus on bone and phosphocalcic metabolism (his PhD was on parathyroid hormone) and renal function. He is a member of the Board of different clinical scientific societies such as the International Osteoporosis Foundation, and the European Renal Association – European Dialysis and Transplant Association.

How They Met

Responding to the question, as to how Dr. Eric Yayo met his mentor, he noted:

I first learned of the work of my esteemed mentor, Professor Cavalier, while I was performing a bibliography review for my own research. I came across many of the fascinating articles he co-authored in collaboration with Professor Pierre Delanaye. So, I reached out and asked him if he could share some experience with me, and to my delight, he spontaneously accepted. This collaboration transformed my personal and professional development through the sharing of his vast knowledge, expertise and experience. It continued with the completion of a joint PhD agreement between the Universities of Liège and Abidjan.

Prof Cavalier was also my promoter at the University of Liège. Even now, after our first association back in 2015, Professor Cavalier continues to support my academic pathway to teach and conduct research in my home town of Abidjan in the Public Hemodialysis Center of Côte d'Ivoire Hospital, and the University Felix Houphouët-Boigny. At the hospital, I am responsible for the clinical laboratory. In our lab, we provide biological testing for patients suffering from chronic kidney diseases (CKD) as well as for hemodialyzed patients. At the University, I am a senior lecturer, and I teach biochemistry to students in pharmaceutical sciences. Professor Cavalier unwavering support not comes in many forms, and on top of that, I know that I can always have a friendly, enlightening discussion with him. And of course, I always have questions.

Background

When asked about his background, Dr. Yayo stated: "My background comprised training as a Pharmacist with specialization in Laboratory Medicine (University Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan), and I undertook a PhD in Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Liège, Belgium.

How His Mentorship Impacted His Career

When the subject of how his mentorship has impacted his career in biochemical and



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Mentorship INTERVIEW

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- Dr. Yayo

pharmaceutical sciences, Dr. Yayo remarked:

Incredibly! It has positively supported my aspirations, and broadened my horizons in what I have done, and continue to do. It has also made me more determined to be successful. I consider my relationship with Professor Cavalier, very fruitful and profoundly enriching. In the beginning, it was rather academic, mainly focused on training by observation, and orientation to the research work. Gradually however, with the high quality of the coaching, we have evolved towards sharing our experiences with support and help in the realization of research projects. Today, we are continuing to work on a collaboration that is being strengthened over time with new joint projects.

The Mentor's Perspective

Being a mentor, and having mentored different students (trainees in clinical chemistry, PhD students, students in pharmaceutical and/or biomedical sciences and lab technicians), for about 15 years, Dr. Cavalier has a different point of view from his mentee, Dr. Yayo. When deliberating on the most valuable aspect of this mentor and mentee relationship, he remarked: "Without any doubt, it is the human adventure that starts at the early beginning of the relationship and that goes on afterwards."

To this, Dr. Yayo noted: "Prof. Cavalier has been and remains an excellent mentor for me. It is a chance to benefit from his human and scientific qualities: simplicity, availability, scientific rigor, motivation, promotion and empowerment of the members of his team."

Dr. Cavalier then responded to how the mentorship program can help young scientists and laboratorians in their career. He noted: "Unfortunately, I have no personal experience with the mentorship program, but any program facilitating the exchange of students or helping people to get experience from abroad, especially they come from an emerging country like Eric, is important." And when reflecting on how young scientists seek out their mentors, Dr. Cavalier remarked: "I guess it is on the scientific reputation of the mentor, in the research domain that the mentee wants to explore."

Invaluable Guidance

When asked to name several projects, and how Dr. Cavalier helped to guide him in accomplishing his projects. Dr. Yayo stated:

We worked on the determination of glomerular filtration rate (GFR) in African black individuals with a reference method (iohexol clearance); as well as on the evaluation of the performances of GFR estimation formulas in black Africans. The protocol validation was designed by Professor Cavalier. I was able to help by performing the technical data analysis in the service of Professor Cavalier,

Mentorship INTERVIEW

“Laboratory medicine is nothing without clinical interactions. Get out of the lab and meet clinicians, participate in their staff meetings, and maybe consultations. This will dramatically increase your knowledge, and build a good relationship with clinicians, who will also see the lab differently, and finally, will help to give you ideas for nice studies!”

– Dr. Cavalier

benefiting from the equipment, materials and inputs required. He has reviewed the scientific articles resulting from these studies.

In addition, we have been working on a study involving parathyroid hormone (PTH) and vitamin D (before and after supplementation), in healthy Ivorians and dialysis patients. In this study, vitamin D was provided by Professor Cavalier, as well as the management of sample shipment in Liège (which is relatively expensive). I also had the opportunity to co-host international IFCC congress sessions on these topics, with Prof. Cavalier. Currently, we are working on a platform comparison project of PTH and vitamin D between the equipment used in our respective departments (CHU Liège vs Public Dialysis Center in Abidjan).

Research Activity & Published Work

Dr. Yayo notes: “My research activity is focused on: methods of determination of Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR) and exploration of mineral-bone disorders in patients suffering from CKD. Cardiovascular pathologies. I am proud to say that we have published some of our results in various journals, including *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine*, *Nephrology Dialysis Transplantation* and the *Annales of Biologie Clinique*.

Common Challenges Faced by Young Scientists

Putting the spotlight on these common challenges, Dr. Cavalier stated that:

From a personal perspective, I would say money to travel and stay in a country which is probably more expensive than the one they live in, and being far from their relatives for a quite long period of time. From a professional one, the lack of immediate credibility, and the difficulty to publish papers in good journals. Also, some pressure to have papers accepted to obtain their PhD thesis in a quite short period of time.

The Advantages of Having a Mentor

When asked more about these advantages, Dr. Yayo notes:

There are many benefits to working with a mentor. This relationship allows the mentee to benefit from the mentor’s vast experience and scientific rigor, and empowers him or her to learn how to find one’s way in scientific research; and to benefit from the mentor’s guidance and reputation in the field. It also allows the exchange of experiences with the other members of the mentor’s team.

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Mentorship INTERVIEW

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How to be a Good Mentor & Maintain a Good Relationship

Professor Cavalier states that:

A good mentor must possess a lot of empathy, besides his scientific skills. Also, he must remain humble and accessible, and should not put too much distance between himself and the mentee. He must be sometimes very patient, and accept that the mentee builds his/her own experience. He must also give clear directions to help the mentee get in the right direction. A true mentor-mentee relationship will last if the mutual respect is present, and especially if this relationship can turn into a friendship.

Advice to Potential Mentees

When considering the advice that he can give to his peers, who are also interested in seeking out mentors such as Dr. Cavalier, Dr. Yayo remarked: "Based on my experience, I think that anybody looking for a mentor should first target researchers who are resource specialists in their research field. The candidate mentee should also actively participate in congresses and scientific meetings pertaining to their research topics. Then, they should present the work that they have already accomplished, and put forward details about what they would like to do, and the difficulties they have faced in their research work. Further, if an opportunity arises, they should seize it, and work on it with the greatest seriousness and the greatest scientific honesty.