

Sixteenth Annual Fellows Retreat Recap

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MENTORING PERSPECTIVE: BATTLING INSECURITY AND INEQUITY BY DR. GISELA STORZ

By Anna Vlachos

Gisela Storz, PhD, a 30-year NICHD investigator and mentor, delivered an honest account of her scientific journey, from her insecurities to the significance of mentorship and diversity in her life. Embarking on a career in science can be a daunting journey filled with uncertainty and anxiety, particularly for members of the scientific community who experience social and institutional inequalities. Dr. Storz, a first-generation American who struggled through her own encounters with inequities in life, expressed her positive outlook and offered encouraging words to those going through similar situations.

During her talk on battling insecurity and inequity, Dr. Storz articulated the lessons she picked up throughout her career. She explained that insecurity occurs constantly in academia: when questioning one's intelligence and position in the scientific community or when doubting the relevancy and importance of one's work. However, Dr. Storz argued that these doubts are part of the process and that battling insecurity eventually leads to strength. She encouraged fellows to capitalize on strengths to pave out a scientific career, but Dr. Storz also emphasized the importance of acknowledging and challenging weaknesses.

Quality mentorship can be incredibly impactful when facing insecurity. Excellent communication with mentors is key. As important as one's senior mentors are, Dr. Storz said that much can be gained from informal mentors such as peers or junior colleagues. She expressed that such a diversity of opinions can provide unique perspectives and support.

Diversity in science is very important, whether it be diversity in race, gender, and nationality or in scientific backgrounds and institutions. Dr. Storz helped initiate the NIH Equity Committee, which strives to address pay and demographic inequalities in the NIH community by looking at the population data and highlighting where inequities exist. Increasing and embracing diversity, Dr. Storz explained, makes science more interesting and exciting, which leads towards more productive and groundbreaking research. Currently, Dr. Storz advocates for diverse mentorship in scientific institutions and tackles inequalities head on—a feat, she said, that is easier to accomplish when surrounded by scientists of various positions and backgrounds.

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Gisela Storz, PhD