

Assessment of need for mentorship in postgraduate medical students

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Abstract:

Mentoring has been recognized as an essential component of medical education in order to harness one's potential to the fullest. Most medical colleges in India including ours have acknowledged this fact and started mentorship programs for their undergraduate students, but the same is lacking when it comes to postgraduate students. We sought to assess whether the postgraduate trainees at our institute felt the need for a mentorship program directed at them. A semi-structured proforma was distributed randomly to 50 postgraduate students of our institute and data was collected anonymously. 92% students returned the filled proforma, 74% felt the need to start a mentorship program for postgraduate students, and 24% had been in a mentorship program in their undergraduate training. 10 out of these 11 felt the need to have a mentor during their postgraduate training as well. This study would help us plan the same with inputs about the structure of the program received through the semi-structured proforma.

Keywords: Mentorship, Mentor, Postgraduate students.

Introduction:

The word "*Mentor*" has been derived from the name of the man who guided Odysseus's son, Telemachus, when he was away on a war (1). Modern literature estimates

more than 20 definitions of mentorship (2). Mentorship is a dual relationship where the mentor plays multiple roles in the mentees life including that of a role model, a guide, a facilitator, a sounding board and many more (3-5). Mentoring has been recognised as an essential component within the medical education and profession for personal and professional development (6).

Mentors help mentees establish career paths, which specialities to choose, the right research work, getting articles published, obtaining grants and networking (7-10). Mentors also play an important role in the mentees personal life in times of crisis, when advice is needed regarding work-life balance and to make important life decisions. An effective and successful mentorship relation has certain characteristics (11). One of the key issues for the success of this relationship is the compatibility between the mentor and the mentee (12-14).

Medical training at most places, including India, offers a formal mentorship program but only at the undergraduate level or faculty level. But the same is lacking when it comes to postgraduate residents. Literature suggests that residents form unstructured and informal mentoring relationships with seniors in their environment. However, numerous reasons, such as time constrains, limited resources, insufficient academic recognition of these informal mentors and lack of adequately trained mentors makes it difficult for the residents to find mentors on their own (15). Thus, a more formalized method of mentorship program may be more beneficial for the students.

But in order to make it effective and successful, it is important to first assess, whether the postgraduate students actually feel the need for such a program. Also, inputs from the potential mentees about their expectation from the mentorship program in terms of structure and function will help us plan a better program. With this background, the following survey was conducted.

Aims & Objectives

1. Do the postgraduate students at NKPSIMS & RC Nagpur feel the need for a mentoring program?
2. To know the inputs from the potential mentees about their expectation from the mentorship program in terms of structure and function.

Methodology:

A total of 180 residents are studying in the various medical and surgical branches at out tertiary care institute at Nagpur. We selected 50 of these residents by simple random sampling to be part of this study. A semi-structured proforma with multiple choice answers was distributed to them and they were asked to fill the same anonymously. The questionnaire contained 12 questions as shown in Figure 1. 46 residents returned the filled questionnaire. Data, thus obtained, was analysed and the results are as follows.

Results and Discussion:

52.7% (24) of the participants knew what exactly mentorship program is. Although, the remaining had a working knowledge of mentoring entails. Around 24 % (11) had experienced a mentoring relationship during their undergraduate training. Out of these 54.5% (6) described their experience as good, 27.27% (3) described it as satisfactory and only 2 participants said that it was either average or not satisfactory. Nearly 74% (34) of the entire sample felt the need of a mentorship program for postgraduate students. These included 10 out of the 11 students who had a previous mentoring experience.

Previous studies mentioned that a truly effective mentorship requires careful consideration of numerous factors in selecting a mentor which may include, but are not limited to the professional expertise of the mentor, their career goals and their personal

qualities (16-17). Keeping this in mind, we sought to understand few of the structural and functional roles of the mentors that these potential mentees had in mind. Only 35% (12/34) of the participants, who felt the need for a mentorship program, thought that it should be compulsory. The remaining 65% (22/34) wanted it to be a voluntary activity. This is also reflected in earlier research which state that voluntary participation is related to a more rewarding experience in mentoring schemes (18).

Almost 94% (32/34) thought that mentors could act as a bridge between them and the institute or their respective departments. While only 58.82% (20/34), believed that mentors could also act as a bridge between them and their families. This can be because of the belief that mentors play a more important role in the professional life compared to the personal life of the mentees. This was further illustrated by the responses to the next question, where only 52% (18/34) felt that mentors can be helpful in their personal besides clinical, academic and administrative areas of life. The remaining felt that mentors would not be helpful in their personal life.

Maximum number of participants i.e. 62%(21/34), wanted mentors to be assigned by their choice, 32.35% (11/34) favoured random assignment of mentors and the remaining preferred assignment according to a fixed system based on admission. Literature suggests that assigned mentorship relations may include faculty members who are not fully committed to the process of mentoring. This may make the relationship unsustainable or ineffective. However, it is yet to be proved that self-determined mentorship relations are more effective than assigned ones (19).

Around 68% (23/34) wanted mentors from their own specialities. This again reinstates the fact that the professional expertise of the mentor is an important consideration when choosing a mentor. Studies have demonstrated that mentors have a deep impact on

knowledge acquisition, efficiency enhancement, better clinical skills, improved productivity, better job satisfaction and increased research interest (20). These may be easier to achieve with mentors from the same field.

While rating who would be a better mentor, senior resident were chosen most (32.35%), followed by Guides (29.41%), lecturers and senior teachers (14.28%), senior PG students (5.88%), with only 2.94% claiming that a colleague would be a better mentor. This is in agreement with past studies which report that senior trainees are preferred over consultants by the junior trainees, as consultants are perceived as less accessible and approachable (21).

Nearly 47% claimed that they would like to meet their mentors at a flexible frequency, as and when they felt the need. While, 32.35% reported that the meetings with their mentors should be scheduled at least once a week. This might reflect either that most potential mentees in our study felt that they might not want to meet their mentors regularly, without any apparent reason. It might also reflect that they might feel that mentors might be busy and may not want a scheduled meeting.

We also asked the participants if they thought that a mentorship program might be disadvantageous to them and if so what could be the reasons. The most frequently cited disadvantage was that mentoring can lead to dependency (28.57%). Other disadvantages specified were feeling of being watched by someone (mentor) all the time (25%), feeling mature enough to handle own problems (21.42%), feeling mentors could be unnecessary interference in their lives (17.85%) and feeling that mentors might act as bosses hampering original ideas and only pushing their own thoughts on the mentees (3.5%).

Conclusion:

As stated earlier mentoring is vital at all levels of medical training. Today, due to the highly competitive research environment, patient overload, various administrative pressures and challenges that residents have to face, it is all the more imperative that they have someone to turn to for advice (15). Thus, the above study reflects the need for starting a postgraduate mentorship program at our institute with the above parameters in mind.

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Figure 1: Questionnaire for the study

This questionnaire is part of the study to assess the need for a mentorship program in postgraduate students of various medical sciences. Please answer the questions below as truthfully as possible, to the best of your ability. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants will be strictly ensured. Kindly tick the answer of your choice and write your answer where appropriate.

1. Do you know what a mentorship program is?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Have you experienced mentorship in your undergraduate training?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, How was your experience?

 - i. Good
 - ii. Satisfactory
 - iii. Average
 - iv. Not satisfactory
 - v. Poor
3. Do you feel the need for a mentorship program in your postgraduate tenure?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, please answer question 4-11; If No, please move to question 12.
4. Should the mentorship program be
 - a. Compulsory
 - b. Voluntary
5. Do you feel mentors can be a bridge between you & the college/department?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Do you feel mentors can be a bridge between you and your family?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. In what areas of your life, could a mentor be helpful?
 - a. Personal
 - b. Clinical
 - c. Academic
 - d. Administrative
 - d. All of the above
 - f. Others, pls.

specify _____
8. Allotment of mentors should be
 - a. Random
 - b. By your choice
 - c. According to admission
9. According to you, a mentor should be from
 - a. Your own department
 - b. Another department
10. According to you, who would be a better mentor?
 - a. A colleague
 - b. Senior PG students
 - c. Senior Residents
 - d. Lecturers
 - e. Senior teachers
 - f. PG guide
11. How often would you like to meet your mentor?
 - a. Once/week
 - b. Once/fortnight
 - c. Once/month
 - d. Once/quarter
 - e. As & when you feel the need
12. What are the disadvantages of a mentorship program (you can tick more than one option)
 - a. Mentors can be unnecessary interference in your life.
 - b. Mentorship may cause dependency
 - c. You are mature enough to handle all your problems
 - d. It will feel like you are being watched by the mentor all the time
 - e. Any other, pls. Specify _____