

Effectiveness Of Student Mentorship Program In An Academic Year - Faculty Perception

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ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Stepping into a medical college can be stressful to many students. A robust Student Mentorship Program (SMP) can help students overcome several academic and personal challenges. A SMP has been functioning in our institution (VMKVMC & H, Salem) for the past 11 years. A need was felt to study the impact and effectiveness of the SMP in the academic year 2018-19, in order to ensure that the program would benefit the students and faculty maximally.

Objectives:

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Sensitize faculty on role of mentors.
2. Introduce a structured mentorship program.
3. Obtain faculty perception of the SMP through a structured & validated mentor evaluation form.
4. Analyse the data obtained from the mentor evaluation form.

Materials & Methods:

A workshop was conducted for faculty of preclinical departments to sensitize them on the role of mentors and usefulness of SMP. 16 faculty members from preclinical departments were enrolled as mentors for first year M.B.B.S students (n=100), 4 faculty mentors were entrusted with 07 student mentees & 12 faculty mentors with 06 student mentees each. A scheduled meeting time every month for an entire academic year was arranged between the mentors and mentees. At the end of the academic year, the perception of faculty was obtained using a structured and validated mentor evaluation form.

Results:

35% of faculty rated the SMP as excellent & 38% as very good; 31% of faculty felt they needed additional training to be effective mentors; 77% of faculty felt their responsibilities as mentors was clearly defined; and 73% of faculty described their relationship with their mentees as being very good. The faculty expressed their satisfaction of conducting SMP as it helped them to develop counseling skills. It helped them to understand the do & don'ts of mentorship. It also helped them to understand the responsibilities of a mentor.

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The challenges faced were with respect to inadequate time spent at each session and absence of few mentees at all the sessions.

Conclusion :

The study has been conducted for benchmarking the perception of faculty mentors on the SMP. A longitudinal data analysis will be performed over the subsequent academic years to obtain statistically significant results. The study will be extended to analyse students' perception of the SMP. Appropriate modifications would then be made to the existing SMP in order to rectify perceived deficiencies in the program.

Keywords:

Mentoring, Diverse background, communication

INTRODUCTION:

The formidable curriculum and the overwhelming campus of medical colleges can make new entrants overwrought with mixed emotions. A robust Student Mentorship Program (SMP) can provide support to students in order to overcome several academic and personal challenges they could face in their new environment. Effective mentoring can get the students to explore themselves and allow them to experience the joy of learning; strategies to stand up to peer pressure and to take courageous decisions when needed, can be inculcated by faculty mentors; sensitivity to feelings of people around can be acquired by emulating faculty mentors¹.

A SMP has been functioning in our institution (VMKVMC & H, Salem) for the past 11 years. The number of students participating in the SMP has been found to be dwindling as they pass to the next phase of M.B.B.S. A very small percentage of students have been found to utilize the SMP by the time they move to final

year of M.B.B.S. Hence a need was felt to study the impact and effectiveness of the SMP in the preclinical years of study, in order to ensure that the program would benefit the students and faculty maximally by resorting to measures for rectifying the perceived deficiencies. The study was therefore conducted for the SMP delivered in the academic year 2018-19.

OBJECTIVES:

To achieve the aim of assessing the effectiveness of SMP, the following objectives were laid down:

1. Sensitizing the preclinical faculty on role of mentors by conducting a workshop.
2. Introduction of a structured mentorship program with guidelines to direct the mentors on conduct of the program.
3. Developing a time table for I M.B.B.S students with SMP in a scheduled time slot.
4. Obtaining faculty perception of the SMP through a structured & validated feedback questionnaire.
5. Analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire.

MATERIALS & METHODS :

A workshop was conducted for faculty of preclinical departments to sensitize them on the role of mentors and usefulness of SMP before the beginning of the academic year. Faculty members from preclinical departments (n=16) were enrolled as mentors for first year M.B.B.S students (n=100). Allotment of mentors and mentees was random. 4 faculty mentors were entrusted with 07 student mentees & 12 faculty mentors with 06 student mentees each. A scheduled meeting time every month for an entire academic year was arranged between the mentors and mentees. The faculty mentors met their respective mentees in the department at a convenient and comfortable location. The mentors had access to the updated progress of academic performance and attendance particulars of the mentees during the SMP sessions. Mentors had one-to-one discussions with the mentees on their strengths & weaknesses. Mentors provided emotional support by counseling mentees in times of stress, equipped poor academic performers with learning strategies to improve their study skills, motivated advanced learners to seek knowledge that could further improve their analytical skills and gave feedback to administrators on the inconveniences that their mentees were facing in the campus that hindered their learning. Mentors closely followed up their mentees throughout the academic year, discussed their progress with the heads of the departments,

met and discussed their mentees with the parents/guardians when required. Mentees were referred to professional counselors when needed. Mentors documented every visit of their mentees with appropriate remarks, on a prescribed format. At the end of the academic year, the perception of faculty on the SMP was obtained using a structured and validated feedback questionnaire.

RESULTS :

35% of faculty rated the SMP as excellent & 38% as very good; 31% of faculty felt they needed additional training to be effective mentors; 77 % of faculty felt their responsibilities as mentors was clearly defined; and 73 % of faculty described their relationship with their mentees as being very good.

The faculty expressed their satisfaction of conducting SMP as it helped them to develop counseling skills and learn the standard guidelines of mentorship and responsibilities of a mentor.

The faculty reported that the challenges faced were with respect to inadequate time spent at each session with mentees having academic and personal difficulties which acted as a barrier to develop good relation between mentor and mentees. Some faculty attributed the indifference exhibited for the program by a few mentees as a barrier to a complete success of the program.

Suggestions for improvement of the program were timely access of student attendance records along with leave particulars every month, by the mentors & increase in time allotted for interaction with the mentees. Faculty also suggested that more numbers of mentorship workshops need to be conducted in order for the mentors to share their experiences and difficulties faced during conduct of the program.

DISCUSSION:

Mentoring is a relationship, which gives people the opportunity to share their professional and personal skills and experiences, and to grow and develop in the process².

The mentoring concept is as old as human race. There are many instances in Indian mythology where a mentor helps his / her mentee realize and attain their full potential².

The word "Mentor" meaning someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person comes from the ancient Greek language. The name is derived from a character found in Homer's *Odyssey* named Mentor who was the adviser of the young Telemachus³.

A mentor can have an impact on developmental outcomes in mentees. Mentoring impacts occur through three inter-related processes:

1. Improving the emotional and social well-being of youth.

2. Improving the cognitive skills through instruction and intellectual challenge.

3. Role-modelling and identity formation.

The extent of a mentor's impact on these three factors depends largely on the quality and longevity of the mentoring relationship³.

Mentorship programs which have been found to be successful are those that are developed and strengthen systems that identify young people most in need of a mentor and least likely to have a mentor, determine their mentoring needs and match them with quality mentors and services to meet those needs⁴.

Mentoring is a mutually beneficial partnership. Mentors can develop leadership skills and gain a personal sense of satisfaction from knowing that they've helped someone.

Mentors learn new perspectives by working with a person less experienced and from a different background⁵.

The Durham University 2009 mentor survey found that mentors stated that the greatest benefit that they derived from the process was providing them with an opportunity to reflect on their own practice⁵.

A study reports teaching skill of mentors improved through mentoring program, and this program helped to build a better student-teacher relationship. An empathetic point of view was developed in mentors regarding the problems faced by the mentees⁶.

Characteristics and skills that stand out for successful mentors have been listed as follows⁷:

- ❖ Providing honest, constructive criticism.
- ❖ Being trustworthy and able to keep discussions confidential.
- ❖ Having good listening skills and listening in order to understand, not reply.
- ❖ The ability to teach, not just tell, such as asking questions to help others determine the answers for themselves.
- ❖ Being able to discuss a wide range of topics and situations.
- ❖ Having a positive, upbeat and caring attitude.
- ❖ Having the ability to motivate the mentee.
- ❖ Having a good sense of humour with the ability to take situations seriously but be able to laugh at themselves.
- ❖ Being open to two-way learning, not only helping the mentee learn but also realizing there are things they could learn from the mentee.

Our study results indicate that the faculty understand the importance of the mentor in shaping the academic journey of mentees and have expressed their satisfaction in conducting SMP as it helped them to develop counseling skills. They have been largely successful in motivating their mentees but find themselves short of providing more effective mentoring and therefore suggest a refresher course in mentor training. Faculty reported that the challenges they faced were with respect to mentees having academic and personal difficulties. Inadequate time spent at

each session and indifference exhibited for the program by a few mentees were cited as reasons for instances of unsatisfactory sessions of SMP.

CONCLUSION:

The study has been conducted for benchmarking the perception of faculty mentors on the SMP. A longitudinal data analysis will be performed over the subsequent academic years to obtain statistically significant results. The study will be extended to analyse students' perception of the SMP. Appropriate modifications would then be made to the existing SMP in order to rectify perceived deficiencies in the program.

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