

Mentoring for Medical Students

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Abstract: Medical education as one of the respected profession of the society worldwide routinely faces casualty as well as stressful events. Medical students through out their academic tenure exposed to stressful environment, which affect their physical health, psychological well-being as well as their career. Many school of consistently comment that strong mentor-mentee relationship greatly influence mentee's career. It holds specific advantages to the mentor as well as mentee benefiting both. This research through a light on importance of mentor mentee relationship. Thus aim of this article is to describe the importance of mentoring in academic medicine, the role of mentor in academic medicine, and importance of having mentoring cell in the medical school. It was observed that paucity of mentors exists in various academic fields including health sciences. Furthermore, there is insufficient awareness of the importance of the mentoring relationship among many students, residents, and junior faculty. Thus to disseminate information regarding mentoring program and to establish successful mentor-mentee relationship, deliberate efforts should be made from deans office, from faculty. Information of such program should be made available by student committee, during student orientation program and through he administrative section under the guidance of dean of the medical school.

Key words: Mentee, medical school, medical undergraduates, mentor, mentoring cell

INTRODUCTION

Medical education though respected in the society, has always been regarded as highly stressful profession. Only the cream of population in the society is eligible for medical education (Ko, 1999).

However, a stressful environment can often exert a negative impact on the academic performance, physical health and psychological well-being of the medical undergraduates (Ko, 1999). During their undergraduate medical tenure; students are expected to imbibe and master an avalanche of knowledge (Ko, 1999). In order to excel in the academic career, students have to make tremendous personal and social sacrifices. Such a highly achievement oriented and competitive environment would definitely make medical undergraduates perturbed. Due to stress, many students may develop to their fullest intellectual potential however, others may break down. These psychological casualties are a waste of valuable human resources. Many schools of thought consistently comment that professional with strong mentors are more productive and have a greater satisfaction in carrier and personal life (Paice *et al.*, 2002, Ramanan, 2002; Wright, 2004).

It is reported that strong mentoring relationships have the most influence on a mentee's ultimate career selection (Garmel, 2004). Many professional societies have formal

mentoring programs, like in business and nursing. Medical specialties generally encourage mentor relationships, although often of an informal nature (Garmel, 2004). It was mentioned by Freedman (2008) in his article that the origin of the word mentor was having historical background. Telemachus, the son of Odysseus had been deprived of father figure as Odysseus was away from home for many years on his journey. So, the goddess Athena disguised herself as Mentor and showered affection upon him as well as provided encouragement to Telemachus. She acted as a role model for him (Freedman, 2008).

In medical fraternity there are rare examples of mentor-mentee relationship like Sir William Osler and the famous surgeon Harvey Cushing. The famous surgeon Harvey Cushing had an internist Mentor named, Sir William Osler. Sir Cushing adopted many of Osler's traits as well as his love for books (Venita, 2001).

The aim of this article is to disseminate information about:

- The importance of mentoring for medical students
- The role of mentor and his/her need for academic medicine
- The importance of having mentoring cell in medical school

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in MGM Medical College, Kamothe Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India during the period of 2008-2009.

The importance of mentoring for medical students: Mentoring, a lifelong process important for career development in academic medicine, is essential to develop confidence in work of mentee. Ideally, it is a dynamic, collaborative, reciprocal relationship focused on a mentee's personal and professional development (Garmel, 2004). It stimulates publication productivity, and achievement of grants, funding as well as helping in career selection (Garmel, 2004; Young, 2009). The long-term goal of such symbiotic relationship is advancing careers and career satisfaction for both the mentor and the mentee (Garmel, 2004). Mentoring can develop either spontaneously, based on mutual interests of mentor and mentee (Garmel, 2004) or be set up institutionally. Mentees benefit from multiple mentors to gain exposure to variety of styles, opinions, and experiences. Thus, the process of Mentoring is categorized into two parts: Career and Psychosocial (Freedman, 2008).

Career mentoring: It is related with the specific behavior or action of mentor, which is supportive for a mentee's career success. e.g. Trait and inclination for books of Sir Willam Osler were accepted by Sir Harvard Cushing, during their tenure in Baltimor at John Hapkins institute. Sir Harward Cushing was deeply influenced by first professor of Medicine, Sir Willam Osler at Baltimore.

Psychosocial mentoring: It is the personal aspect of the relationship in which the supportive action of mentor helps mentee to flourish his professional identity, sense of confidence and productivity.

The role of mentor and his/her need for academic medicine:

Who will be a mentor: A dynamic figure who will provide support and guidance. A mentor has been defined as an individual with huge experience and knowledge based on which he is committed to provide career guidance, advice as well as moral support. Mentor is someone of advanced rank or experience who guides, teaches, develops as well as provides moral support to a novice (Garmel, 2004).

Thus, mentors are peers, near their mentee's level of training; or sensitive personalities who listen and understand the mentee's emotions and provide emotional and career support, facilitate insight and change, help them in making decisions or can be likened to a lighthouse who navigates the mentee in a proper direction. Hence they encourage the mentee to take limited risks in

order to open the doors of opportunities (Young, 2009). Single mentor may not perform all these roles and embody all these traits. Every mentor has different strengths and qualities. Hence, one mentee may have multiple mentors capable of making diverse contributions for the progress of mentee. (Garmel, 2004) benefiting from multiple mentors through their personal and professional development. Likewise, mentors are benefited by gaining professional stimulation, personal enrichment, satisfaction, and a sense of giving back to their profession (Young, 2009).

In the field of health sciences, mentors can help with day-to-day tasks, such as improving coping strategies of mentee to face difficulties, to take more substantial decisions such as career planning and progressing in career. Students in their academic career probably already have an informal mentor; to whom they turn for advice, for emotional support, would like to emulate in career path or want to inculcate specific skills of mentor like presentation style, surgical skill, communication skill, leadership etc.

The role of mentor: Thus, mentor is needed in order to solve the burning issues like career choice, take up specialization in interested subject, training to achieve fellowships, grants for research projects, knowledge acquisition in order to apply for such fellowships and thus to achieve academic excellence. Our study revealed that first year medical undergraduate needed tremendous psychological support and guidance as they had left their protected family environment in order to fulfill their dream of becoming doctors.

Good mentors value mentoring as part of their profession. In spite of focusing on their own professional and personal needs; they should help mentee to develop their fullest intellectual potentials (Young, 2009). Role of mentor is very important for mentee in order to acquire knowledge of interpersonal skills with physicians, nurses and staff as well as with patients and their caretakers. In order to deal with difficulties in medical profession like medical error, ethical issues related to medical practice, emotional issues related to patient and caretaker, mentor provides proper guidance time to time. Hence, freedom should be provided to the students or mentee to change mentor or approach many mentors because this intense personal interaction and relationship evolves over time during which both mentor and mentee modifies their work (Waugh, 2002).

In order to fulfill the role of mentor, first step to be taken by mentor is to devote time for this noble cause and stick to the commitments. Mentor mentee interaction should occur at least 1 h per week. In order to give guidance mentor may be available on the site or they can guide to the mentee from distance via e-learning or computer assisted learning but should be on regular basis.

In order to encourage mentee, mentor should help him to reach his goal by informing him about new opportunities in academics, exposing him to networking, as well as protecting him from harmful events and threats. In order to build up confidence, mentor can share personal experiences including failures with him and should receive feedback from mentee in order to make the relationship perfect.

Mentee: amateur but sensitive vibrant personality: Ideally the mentee is a sensitive and active partner who equally helps in shaping mentor-mentee relationship. The mentee is not a robot who collects mentors advice, wisdom and follows mentor's order but rather is an active participant who helps in shaping the relationship (Young, 2009). "Managing up" is an unique part of mentor-mentee relationship and is invaluable for its sustenance. It is equally important in mentoring relationships during the course of academic career (Young, 2009).

The idea behind this is that the mentee takes ownership of and directs the relationship, letting the mentor know what he or she needs and communicating the way his or her mentor prefers. Ideally, a motivated mentee manages the work of the relationship by planning and setting the meeting agenda, asking questions, listening, completing assigned tasks, and requesting feedback (Young, 2009). Hence it becomes easy for the mentor to help mentee thus paving the way for the successful and satisfying relationship (Young, 2009).

Need of institutional mentoring cell to find out proper mentor: Mentoring creates a dynamic relationship and special form of educational service, which evolves over time (Waugh, 2002). In order to provide such supporting system to the students, there should be a functional Mentoring Cell in each Medical Institute. Mentoring Cell should inspire the faculty to commit themselves for personal and professional growth as well as well being of students (Garmel, 2004).

However, finding of such faculty as a mentor is a difficult and challenging task for students especially in first year of undergraduate medicine due to their limited exposure (Garmel, 2004). Hence, students should be encouraged to approach the mentoring cell to seek out proper mentors. Information of institutional mentoring cell as well as biographies of faculty who are interested in mentoring should be made available through dean's office or during orientation program to the students.

In our study, we found that undergraduate medical students were more close to their immediate seniors as well as junior faculty members. Hence, junior faculty who are experienced and closer in age group to students should be encouraged to participate in this noble responsibility.

DISCUSSION

Despite the successes that many individuals having mentors experience, not all students enter a mentoring relationship. Unfortunately, the paucity of mentors exists in various academic fields including health sciences. Furthermore, there is an insufficient awareness of the importance the mentoring relationship among many students, residents and junior faculty. Students may feel as if they are bothering a busy faculty member and therefore do not pursue such relationships. Faculty may feel that the commitment of time, energy and resources to a student distract them from other more important academic and personal responsibilities (Garmel, 2004).

As an academic faculty member, one of the important roles is to serve as a mentor for the prosperity of budding physician and offering preclinical students the opportunity to shadow or spend time in the Emergency Department. This is (Garmel, 2004) another way to share enthusiasm for the specialty and be available to potential mentees (Garmel, 2004). Even more important is to devote time, to keep one-self approachable, assessable and show enthusiasm to maintain and blossom up such relationship. (Garmel, 2004) In a mentoring process, there should be a timely exposure of mentor to the prospective mentee (Garmel, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Thus, to conclude, mentoring helps to foster strong symbiotic relationship between mentor and mentee's ultimate career selection. An effective mentor helps the mentee to navigate not only the maze of professional organizations and committees but also helps to achieve global platform of medical career without borders. Hence, there is an urgent need for a functional mentoring cell and mentoring programs to be actively pursued in medical school.

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