

Mentoring Needs And Expectations: A Qualitative Study of Medical Interns

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I. Introduction

The perception of support received by a medical intern from a mentor paves the path in the process of development and learning in the mentees professional life. An active approach is the need of the hour in the medical education system, wherein the support from the mentor is considered to help the mentee to excel in his or her professional life (Ramanan RA, Phillips RS, Davis RB, Silen W, Reede JY; Frei E, Stamm M, Buddeberg-Fischer B2010). The role of a faculty advisor is paramount in helping an intern choose his or her future stream of specialty training (Paukert JL, Hsieh G., JAMA 2001, Osborn EH 1993). Medical internship is demanding and it leads to conflict, fatigue and even resentment among medical students ultimately even leading to stress and burnout (Bellini LM, Baime M, Shea JA 2002). Practices of mentoring in the West have shown positive results, this has led to higher levels of career satisfaction and enjoyment in the learning environment of interns (Pololi L, Knight S 2005; Schapira MM, Kalet A, Schwartz MD, Gerrity MS 1992).

Within the Indian context there appears to be a paucity of research evidence in the area of mentoring practices and its impact on medical interns.

II. Literature Review

There has been an emphasis on the role of mentoring in medical academia and efforts have been made to define and clarify the features of mentoring relationships (Sambunjak D, Straus SE, Marusic, 2010). Earlier studies have characterized certain behavior expressed by effective mentors, others have identified certain personal characteristics that are common to good mentoring. Behaviour such as role modelling, financial support, information about careers, work-life balance, networking etc have been reported as traits of good mentors (Straus SE, Chatur F, Taylor M, 2009; Jackson VA, Palepu A, Szalacha L, Caswell C, Carr PL, Inui T, 2003; Aagaard EM, Hauer KE, 2003).

While some researchers have identified traits such as altruism and accessibility as a good requirement, others have reported the strong need for compatibility between mentor and protege (Cho CS, Ramanan RA, Feldman MD, 2011; Leslie K, Lingard L, Whyte S, 2005; Williams LL, Levine JB, Malhotra S, Holtzheimer P, 2004). In recognizing the important features required for successful mentoring, relationship is crucial since it influences varied outcomes, such as career choices, the intention to be successful in the profession, and the productivity of interns (Sambunjak D, Straus SE, Marusic A. 2006).

Traditional perception of mentoring referring to the dyadic relationship between an experienced expert and less experienced protégé has evolved (Sambunjak D, Marui A, 2009). Researchers have pressed upon the need for peer-group mentoring with a focus on collaboration and team-building. These studies have elucidated the benefits to the protégé especially through expansion of knowledge, empowerment, engagement and fulfillment.

Hence the purpose of this study is to gain a richer understanding of the qualities and attributes of the mentor from the proteges perspective within an Indian context. Medical interns are at a juncture where they are vulnerable to various challenges. It is therefore pertinent to note that medical interns are an ideal population to capture and explore the dynamics of mentor-protégé relationships.

III. Methodology

The participants in this study comprised of a sample of 30 medical interns (50% male and 50% female). The participants were interns from the Goa Medical College. The tool used for the study was a semi-structured interview template comprising of questions that were posed to find out the needs, wants and expectations of the medical interns from their mentors within their study curriculum. The research has been based on primary data

collected from the in-depth interviews conducted. The insights of this study have been provided in the findings section. A sample of the questions posed during the interview are as follows:

Interview Questions

1. Why do you feel the need for a mentor?
2. What are your expectations from a mentor?

IV. Research Methods and Findings

The research objective was to find out the medical interns needs, wants and expectations from their mentors within the learning framework. Based upon the discussions with students the following aspects were discovered.

Importance of mentoring

- It helped understand the nuances of medical practice along with continuous monitoring of their progress.
- The need for mentoring was more strongly felt by female students of the sample who suggested that mentors were like role models, and especially useful in clarifying their doubts, with one on one chat and interaction.
- The medical interns expressed their need to be mentored by consultant faculty members especially because they were more comfortable with their approach and communication.
- Mentors who guided their students in understanding their theory through practical case study experiences, claimed better control on their learning.
- Faculty and students should jointly work for creation of knowledge by doing research and publication. Many interns felt that they were just being trained in the medical practice and were not fully aware of knowledge creation. Apart from practice, they looked forward to ‘hand-holding’ in research activity thus leading to publications as well as presentations at medical conferences.
- A number of students claimed to understand how to open new clinics and run hospitals as future entrepreneurs. They felt that this component needed more support from the institution in the form of incubation cells that would help them run small medical practices that could then turn out to be models for real life practices.
- The medical interns expressed some vital behavioral approaches of the mentor that make the mentoring experience fruitful.

One mentee reported that sometimes mentors are too negative in their expectation from their mentee and do not really understand. It would be beneficial if the mentor looked at the whole problem holistically and then reached out to help.

I found some residents and Consultants too intimidating and harsh in their dealings with interns. I would like to be better accepted as part of the team.

Some consultants took us along with them for informal clinical group discussions. This helped us understand the clinical management of patients better, as also the expectations from us interns.

- Students expressed their needs to be supported in understanding how to undertake research projects.
I was happy to receive support in my college to solve clinical problems and also to think critically. My professor and friend guided me to even draft a research paper. This I think is crucial to mentors role (Female Mentee).
I was encouraged by my consultant to represent the college at a national quiz. In doing so I met a lot of students and was exposed to a lot of student research activities at the conference.
- Medical interns were drawn towards mentor behaviour which encouraged critical thinking, guidance in choosing a career path and providing networking resources.

A female mentee reported: A mentor ought to have integrity and be a role model, and should be willing to help and connect the dots between the institution and professional contacts. Yet another mentee reported that mentors should widen the perspective of critical analysis and decision making, keeping a balance between evidence based professional and personal choices.

V. Conclusion

The impact of the education scenario within the medical framework is such that it is challenging to record conclusive arguments. The findings of this study indicate that much is required within the Indian medical education system, especially with reference to mentoring support. One has to take a serious note of this as the

medical profession is considered a specialized profession and yet with the growing number of students joining the medical course, the medical fraternity has to address the needs of medical novices and interns. Apart from allowing informal mentoring practices, the medical fraternity needs to implement structured mentoring interventions along with appropriate feedback and corrections.

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