

## **Mentoring undergraduate medical students: Experience from Bahria University Karachi**

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### **Abstract**

**Objective:** To explore the perceptions and the effects on mentors regarding mentoring medical students at Bahria University Medical and Dental College, Karachi, Pakistan.

**Methods:** An anonymous data collection tool was distributed to 22 faculty members trained as mentors at Bahria University Medical and Dental College, Karachi, Pakistan.

**Result:** Close-ended questions reflected that majority of the mentors rate themselves as "good" or "satisfactory" mentors (55% and 45%). The mentors give enough time to their mentees and are comfortable with any gender or culture, and help their mentees settle down and improve them academically as well as personally (86.36%). Half the mentors sacrifice their personal time for the development of their mentees. All expressed personal satisfaction and fulfillment in observing their mentees' success. Of all respondents, 86% ask mentees for regular feedback. Fifty nine percent mentors felt that their mentees showed good improvement academically due to these sessions, while 41% said that they were satisfied with the academic results of their mentees.

**Conclusion:** The perception of mentors about the structured mentoring programme subjectively appears to be a promising strategy for young medical students. Objective assessment of these mentors is needed.

**Keywords:** Mentor, Mentee, Medical students, Mentorship programme (JPMA 61:790; 2011).

### **Introduction**

The word mentor means a trusted advisor. This phenomenon of mentorship has its roots in Greek mythology. Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope grew up without his father's guidance as Odysseus was away fighting in Troy. Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, war, arts, industry, justice and skills, instructed and guided the young Telemachus. Mentoring is a life-long process that has a significant and meaningful role in career building and development of the mentee. The mentor is a person of higher rank who provides support and guidance to the beginner.<sup>1</sup> This mutual relationship has a significant impact on the mentee's personal and professional progress.<sup>2</sup>

Medical students face an enormously stressful environment and this can affect their academic performance and health.<sup>3</sup> In order to combat this stressful life they should have an experienced person to whom they can look for help, guidance, counseling and supervision. Thus effective mentoring is important to a mentee's professional success in academic medicine.<sup>4</sup> Also, many schools of thought consider that students with good mentors are more successful in their careers and personal life.<sup>5,6</sup>

It is essential that mentors should be chosen with great care. It is also important to consider the age of the mentor; those at the beginning of their profession are likely to be more concerned about their own careers and progress — leading to disinterest in mentoring.<sup>7</sup> In order to accomplish the

important task of mentoring, the mentor has to give an appropriate amount of time to the task.<sup>8</sup> A mentor should be easily approachable and must show keenness in encouraging and nurturing the mentor-mentee relationship.<sup>1</sup> Qualities of a good mentor include availability, ability to listen and problem solving skills together with a professional moral character. The priority is the best interest of the mentee.<sup>9</sup> Also it is well known that working with a good mentor can help mentee to develop appropriate decision making skills.

Literature search shows that encouragement provided by the mentor provides direction to mentees.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to observe that individuals who had high ranking mentors during their early career are more likely to be more successful and to publish one or more research papers every year.<sup>11</sup> Therefore a good mentor is a trainer who asks questions rather than gives simple answers and helps mentees develop problem solving and decision making skills.<sup>12</sup>

Garmel reported that mentoring is a time consuming job and can hamper mentors from achieving their important academic and personal responsibilities;<sup>1</sup> the extra workload can limit their own success. Therefore, mentoring must be accepted as a selfless act without expecting incentives; mentoring creates a feeling of self satisfaction and improvement in ones own personal growth.<sup>13</sup>

According to Feldman et al, comparison of faculty who are mentors with those who are not showed a higher level of self satisfaction in the former group.<sup>14</sup> This in turn

shows that there is a direct relationship between mentorship, good leadership skills and self satisfaction.<sup>15</sup>

The mentor-mentee relationship can be shattered if there is absence of respect and support for each other. This bond can also be damaged if there is violation of boundaries and physical relationships.<sup>16</sup> Thus in order to have a successful mentor-mentee collaboration and association, it should be a two way support linked with consideration for each other.<sup>17</sup>

As mentoring is crucial in this modern era for training and education of new students to shape them into better doctors, the Bahria University Medical and Dental College (BUMDC) implemented a structured mentorship programme since the foundation of college. There are 200 students of first and second year MBBS; thus the mentor mentee ratio is approximately 1:10. This study was conducted to explore the perceptions and effects on mentors regarding mentoring programme for medical students at BUMDC, Karachi, Pakistan.

### Methodology

An anonymous data collection tool was developed by Department of Medical Education and distributed to faculty members who were trained to be mentors. There were 22 mentors and all agreed to participate. This was a qualitative research study, Data Collection Tool was self administered and deposited in a drop box. The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended (Table) and open ended questions (Appendix). There were a total of

for each item. For the open-ended questions each answer was analyzed and noted.

### Results

The response rate of the mentors was 100%. The close-ended questions were designed to determine the perception of the mentors regarding mentoring and the effect it has on them. Its design also focused on the behaviour pattern of the mentors towards their mentee which was further enhanced by the open-ended questions.

Analysis of the close-ended questions showed that the majority of the mentors rated themselves as good or satisfactory (55% and 45%) and are sure about their role and ability to provide full guidance to the students, even to the extent of protecting them (73%: yes+sometimes). Although the mentors do not attain any personal monetary benefits they undertook this duty with zeal and eagerness. The mentors give adequate time to their mentees and are comfortable with any gender or culture; they helped the mentee settle down and improve academically as well as personally (86.36%). Some of the mentors are devoted to their mentoring that they are ready to sacrifice their personal time for the development of their mentee (50%). Mentorship may result in formation of lasting relationships and adds to the professional growth and maturation of new comers. All of the mentors expressed their sense of personal satisfaction and fulfillment in observing their mentees' success (100%). Although the mentors do feel burdened at times since this is an additional and time

### Appendix:

Q. No	Questions (open-ended)
1	What does mentoring mean to you?
2	How long have you been a mentor?
3	Do you find mentoring useful for the students? Why?
4	In your opinion do your mentees find mentoring useful? Why?
5	Do your students enthusiastically attend mentoring sessions? Give reason why
6	If your mentee puts his/her trust in you and discloses his/her secret to you and asks you not to disclose it further? What will you do?
7	Does mentoring help you in any way? How?
8	Does mentoring help your students in academics? How?
9	What do you like about mentoring relationship?
10	What do you not like about mentoring relationship?

35 items in the questionnaire with variations in the pattern of responses. The options in the close-ended questionnaire which were to be chosen by the study participants were different for each question to match the responses to the questions. The open-ended questions were designed to probe the respondents own perceptions more objectively.

For the close-ended questions the numbers of responses were summed up and frequency was determined

consuming task, however, they felt a sense of contentment and accomplishment in performing this responsibility. Around 86% of mentors ask mentees for regular feedback, and 59% mentors reported good academic improvement while 41% observed satisfactory changes in their mentees due to these sessions.

Analysis of the open-ended questions also reflected the mentor's perception about mentoring; some interesting responses to different questions were:

Table:

Q. No	Question	Rating = n* (%)			
1	How do you rate yourself as a mentor?	Good= 12 (54.54)	Satisfactory=10 (45.45)	Unsatisfactory= none	
2	Do you report unethical issues, even if it may harm your mentee?	Always=4 (18.18)	Sometimes=9 (40.9)	Never=9 (40.9)	
3	Do you feel reluctant in reporting cases that may harm your mentee?	Yes=5 (22.72)	Sometimes=11 (50)	No=6 (27.27)	
4	How many mentees do you have?	5 or less=1 (4.5)	6-10=14 (63.63)	10 or more=4 (18.18)	20 or more= 3 (13.63)
5	Are you in contact with your mentee's parents?	Yes= 2 (9.09)	No=20 (90.9)		
6	Do you get any extra payment for working as a mentor?	Yes= none		No= 22 (100)	
7	How important is your mentee for you?	Not imp= 1 (4.5)	Very important= 21 (95.45)	My promotion depends on it= none	
8	Do you help your mentee to contact those people who are valuable for them?	Yes= 19 (86.36)	No= 3 (13.63)		
9	How frequently do you meet your mentee?	Once a week= 10 (45.45)	Once a month=5 (22.72)	Annually= none	Multiple times= 7 (31.8)
10	Is your mentee of your same sex?	Yes= none		No= none	
11	Do you think you would be more comfortable if the mentee would be of same sex as you?	Yes= none		No= 1 (4.5)	
12	How frank are you with your mentee?	Very frank= 13(59.09)	Not at all frank= 1 (4.5)	It does not matter= 21 (95.45)	
13	How is your relation with your mentee?	Collegial= 2 (9.09)	Friendly= 20 (90.90)	Not sure= 8 (36.36)	
14	Have you given your phone number to your to your mentee?	Yes= 15 (68.18)		No= 7 (31.81)	
15	Have you given your email address to your mentee?	Yes= 13 (59.09)		No= 9 (40.90)	
16	Have you given your home address to your mentee?	Yes= 1 (4.5)		No= 21 (95.45)	
17	Are you aware of your mentee's hobbies/interest?	Yes= 20 (90.9)	No= 1 (4.5)	I don't think I should be knowing that= 1 (4.5)	
18	Do you assist your mentee with professional development?	Yes= 22 (100)		No= none	
19	Is your mentee free to call you whenever s/he needs you?	All the time= 15 (68.18)	In the morning/ evening only=5 (22.72)	Don't know= 2 (9.09)	
20	How are you going to react if your mentee violates boundary?	Counsel him/her= 20 (90.9)	Scold him/her= none	Take him/her to supervisor = 2 (9.09)	Ask for mentee to be replaced= none
21	Do you get a sense of personal satisfaction when you see your mentee progressing?	Yes= 22 (100)		No= none	
22	Have you observed any improvement in academics of your mentee after mentoring him/her?	Good Improvement=13 (59.09)	Satisfactory=9 (40.90)	Unsatisfactory= none	
23	Have you ever asked your mentees for feedback?	Yes= 19 (86.36)		No= 3 (13.63)	
24	What do you do when your mentees come to you with problems you cannot solve? Do you tell them that:	It is out of your capacity= 2 (9.09)	Ask a person that is involved directly= 7 (31.81)	This is practical life =9 (40.90)	Face it like a man=4 (18.18)
25	Do you think that you sacrifice your personal time solving issues of mentees that could have been spent with your family or studying for an exam?	Yes, sometimes= 11 (50)	Yes, most of the time= none	No=11 (50)	

### Q1. What does mentoring mean to you?

"In my opinion it is a two way communication, talking to them in a friendly atmosphere during which views of bilateral interest are exchanged in a confidential environment."

"A process of guiding individuals to assess their own capabilities in circumstances and make them able enough to make their own best possible decisions accordingly."

### Q2. Do you find mentoring useful for the students? Why?

"Yes, because it serves as an outlet for students and they can discuss their academic, social or personal issues under a comfortable environment. It helps the students in their personal development."

"Yes it helps them to vent out their feelings and cope

with difficult situations."

### **Q3. Do your students enthusiastically attend mentoring sessions? Give reason why?**

"Some of them attend these sessions because they think that it may give them an edge in internal evaluation."

"Yes, they feel relieved after mentoring sessions."

"Those students who are weak in their studies attend with enthusiasm."

### **Q4. Does mentoring help you in any way? How?**

"Enhances my own abilities of problem solving attitude and counseling."

"Yes. It gives me happiness and satisfaction that at least I am trying to bring some betterment to a human."

"Yes of course, it gives me the sense of satisfaction by helping the younger ones which in turn helps in my own personal and professional development."

"Yes, it helps me to be patient and to learn to listen to others and their points of view."

### **Q5. What do you like about mentoring relationship?**

"Internal satisfaction, contentment."

"Strengthens student-teacher relationship."

"Its purpose."

"Being a mentor gives me a sense of satisfaction plus listening to mentees problems also helps in own personal development."

"Personal satisfaction, personal grooming, improvement in interpersonal and communication skills."

### **Q6. What do you not like about mentoring relationship?**

"Extreme frankness that causes to cross boundaries makes me insecure."

"Feel helpless when I cannot solve mentees issues."

"Sometimes personal and family time has to be compromised."

"Sometimes it becomes awkward discussing personal matters."

"Sometimes we become biased in solving our mentees problems."

## **Discussion**

Mentoring is an ancient notion that dates back to

Greek mythology. Literature search shows that introduction of mentoring structured programme in medical colleges began in the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> Structured mentoring programmes have proved to be successful at several levels. The mentor's role is the key role, resulting in the progress of the mentor-mentee relationship. This relationship requires equal participation of both parties to be able to obtain excellent outcomes, but this evolves over a certain period of time. However, mentoring must be considered as a process rather than a result.

There is lack of structured mentoring programmes both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in most countries.<sup>19</sup> Keeping in mind the benefits of such a programme, Bahria University Medical and Dental College (BUMDC) began a structured mentoring programme in 2008, and the trained mentors who have varied experiences are satisfied with their roles as a mentor and all claim to gain a sense of personal satisfaction. The mentors are deeply involved in all activities related to their mentees and maintain their records in the form of a portfolio. On the first interaction with the mentee, the mentors were asked to fill a Performa which had basic questions regarding the mentee. Over a period of two years the mentors have observed a positive change in most mentees' academic performance, confidence, dressing and interpersonal relationships. The mentors perceive the programme a proven success, consider their mentee to be very important and give them credit for its success.

Over a period of time the relationship between mentor and mentee has become friendlier which allows mentee to discuss their issues easily in an encouraging atmosphere. However, mentors feel helpless when they are unable to guide their mentee in some situations which include administrative issues and hostel problems, although they try their best to facilitate them in all aspects.

The main aim of this programme is to foster change at academic and personal growth level. The portfolio<sup>20</sup> maintained by the mentors is to make both mentor and mentee aware of his/her progress. Marr et al<sup>21</sup> reports that mentoring programme of University of California, San Francisco has established this programme to promote and enhance growth and well being of its students. Kanter et al<sup>22</sup> appreciate the personal and professional development of the students who are mentored under the guidance of the mentoring programme called the Scholarly Project.

The mentoring method used at BUMDC is done in two stages every fortnight. The schedule is a part of the first and second year time table and a slot is dedicated to this process to ensure that the students and teachers are free to participate easily. During stage one the students are spoken to in focus groups which has approximately 10 students. In the second stage mentees are called one by one and this

interaction is personal and confidential. Thus the mentor has to be aware of the privacy rights of his/her mentee and must not break his/her confidence.<sup>10</sup> In certain cases if the mentee requests for time other than the set dates, the mentor usually makes time to discuss with the mentee. It is identified in several studies that the characteristics of good, effective mentoring, are that the mentor must be available; s/he should be non-judgmental and must encourage the mentee. The mentor should be a role model who is able to build a professional atmosphere and facilitate in the mentee's personal growth.<sup>23</sup>

Mentoring programmes benefit students of both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels while simultaneously benefitting the mentors. Some of the benefits that the mentors experienced are feeling of being respected, acknowledged, and needed.<sup>16,24</sup> Although in our programme the mentors do not receive any incentives for this extra responsibility, they still feel a satisfaction in undertaking this duty. Mentors claim to take pride in their mentee's growth and feel an overwhelming happiness at their achievements. Thus mentoring is an altruistic act not undertaken for incentives or any other self benefit. Mentorship in medical colleges has an important and productive influence on academics and personal development of the medical students.

### Conclusion

The Bahria University Medical and Dental College's structured mentoring programme is perceived by the mentors to be a successful and promising strategy for grooming young medical students. The mentors served as role models and they devoted a lot of time in shaping the academic, personal and professional growth of the new comers. Mentorship nurtured positive changes in mentees over the two years attachment, with another three years remaining before the final year MBBS. This relationship between mentor and mentee has proven to be beneficial for both. This relationship is surrounded by a friendly and encouraging atmosphere with a two way learning process. The mentors maintain a portfolio of their mentees so that both are aware of the progress. Very importantly, mentors expressed a sense of satisfaction in performing this task, feel pride in the achievements of their mentees and undertake mentoring enthusiastically. The mentors sometimes even sacrifice their personal time in facilitating and counseling their mentees. Thus the altruistic act of mentoring plays an important part and a major role in the productive development of the medical student.

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