


# Regarding the Article Students' Perception of Peer-Students Mentoring Program "Big Sibling Mentoring Program" to Complement Faculty Mentoring of First-Year Medical Students in Saudi Arabia [Letter]

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## Dear editor

We read with great interest about the "Big Sibling" initiative at King Saud University's College of Medicine, which provides valuable insights into peer mentoring in medical education.<sup>1</sup>

The study highlights the programme's success in reducing stress and improving the self-confidence, time management, and academic engagement of first-year students. These findings align with research showing peer mentoring helps ease the transition into the demanding medical curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Peer mentors, having recently navigated similar challenges, are better equipped to offer emotional support. This aspect of mentorship can be impactful in building resilience and reducing isolation among new students.<sup>3,4</sup>

However, we express concerns regarding the methodology used. Students may feel compelled to present their experiences favourably,<sup>5</sup> especially if they harbour concerns about affecting their relationships with mentors. To address this bias, the feedback forms used for data collection should be anonymised. Furthermore, future research should integrate objective measures of academic performance, such as comparing results from before and after the scheme was introduced. Employing mixed-method approaches combining qualitative interviews with quantitative assessments could yield a more comprehensive understanding of the mentoring.

Moreover, the study does not address other significant factors influencing the mentoring experience, such as the broader educational environment, faculty support, and institutional resources. These elements can play a crucial role in shaping student experiences and outcomes in mentoring programmes.<sup>6</sup> Exploring the interplay between these contextual factors and peer mentoring initiatives would enhance the programme's overall effectiveness.

While the structure of the programme has its merits, the criteria for selecting mentors predominantly based on GPA and extracurricular activities may overlook other important qualities, such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and communication skills. A more holistic approach to mentor selection could foster deeper connections between mentors and mentees, as supported by literature advocating for the inclusion of soft skills in mentorship training.<sup>7,8</sup> Furthermore, it would increase the number of mentors available in the programme, thus reducing the size of the WhatsApp group, allowing mentees to feel more comfortable engaging in conversations and cultivating stronger bonds.

The ongoing development of mentor-mentee relationships beyond the initial orientation stated in the study is crucial for maintaining engagement and ensuring positive outcomes. Regular mentor training sessions and feedback mechanisms could help continuously improve the mentoring relationship, reflecting findings from studies indicating that structured

training significantly enhances the quality of mentorship.<sup>8</sup> Gaining insights from mentors about their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement could help refine the programme to meet the diverse needs of all participants.

As final-year medical students, we have observed the transformative effect of mentorship firsthand and commend the emphasis on fostering peer support. To further refine the programme, collecting additional data from first-year students can enhance compatibility between mentor-mentee allocations to foster better matches. Furthermore, establishing designated times for mentor meetings throughout the academic year—especially during particularly stressful periods—tailors support to students' needs.

In conclusion, while the Big Sibling Programme shows promising outcomes, addressing these limitations would strengthen its capacity as a robust support system.

## Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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