LETTER

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

Deanna Yiu*, Prince Okong'o [iD]*, Humza Hossain*

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Buckingham Medical School, Buckingham, UK

*These authors contributed equally to this work

Correspondence: Deanna Yiu, Student Post Room, The University of Buckingham, Hunter Street Buckingham MK18 1EG, Buckingham, UK, Email deannayiu@gmail.com

Dear editor

Having read the study by Alobaid et al,[1] we would like to commend the authors for their work in advancing the important theme of peer mentoring within medical education. With this letter, we aim to provide commentary and recommendations from the perspective of medical students based in the UK.

The study aimed to assess first-year medical students' perceptions of the Big Sibling-Mentoring Program (BSMP) which took place at a single institution in Saudi Arabia. The study also aimed to assess the ability of the BSMP to change students' academic performance. The BSMP involved senior medical students mentoring first years through regular meetings. A survey sent out by the end of the first semester showed a high response rate of 95.62%, indicating strong engagement. The results demonstrated that the majority of mentees perceived improvements in their academic skills, self-confidence and stress reduction.

Peer mentoring in medical education is well established as a means by which students can be supported in their studies. Burgess et al highlight that peer tutors can help provide relatable insights and foster a supportive environment for learning.[2] By lowering barriers that are typically associated with approaching authoritative figures, peer mentors may provide a more accessible source of teaching, as noted by Gilmour et al.[3] The high level of satisfaction reported by the participants helps to underscore the potential benefits of programs such as this.

Despite the compelling results, we would like to highlight a few areas where the study could be improved. To start, the use of WhatsApp as the primary communication platform, while convenient, raises privacy, professionalism and confidentiality concerns. We recommend exploring more formal communication channels in future works. Additionally, the absence of a control group in this study makes it difficult to ascertain whether the BSMP is solely responsible for the reported benefits. Another study by Rashid et al includes a control group, finding that those who participated in a peer mentoring program had improved exam scores to those who did not.[4] Furthermore, the use of more objective measures such as academic performance data and validated stress assessment tools could help to enhance the strength of the findings.

To conclude, the study highlights the positive role of peer mentorship, showing strong engagement between mentors and mentees. Improvements reported include improved confidence, academic performance and reduced stress. To enhance this study, more extensive data samples are required across different institutions whilst incorporating a control group. Use of alternate communication platforms may also overcome data and privacy concerns. Finally, we would like to commend the authors' work for their contribution to the field of medical education.

Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

References

1. Alobaid AM, Alghamdi MA, Alhumidi A, Al-Jobair A, Alangari AM. Students' perception of peer–students mentoring program (Big Sibling-Mentoring Program): a cross-sectional study from Saudi Arabia. *Adv Med Educ Pract*. 2023;14:537–545. doi:10.2147/AMEP.S382196
2. Burgess A, McGregor D, Mellis C. Medical students as peer tutors: a systematic review. *BMC Med Educ*. 2014;14(1):115. doi:10.1186/1472-6920-14-115
3. Gilmour A, Krothapalli S, Marshall K, Wilson R, Macaulay S. Peer mentoring for first-year medical students: a qualitative evaluation of the "Parent" program. *med Teach*. 2020;42(6):684–690. doi:10.1080/0142159X.2020.1727855
4. Rashid MS, Sobowale O, Gore D. A near-peer mentoring program to improve the exam scores of first-year medical students. *BMC Med Educ*. 2011;11(1):11. doi:10.1186/1472-6920-11-11