

# Mentoring in higher education

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## Dear editor

We read the paper by Al Qahtani<sup>1</sup> with great interest and agree that mentoring is an important educational tool. As medical students from the University of Manchester who have been exposed to various mentoring schemes, we have experienced some of the benefits mentioned in this article. We found that the mentoring schemes provided us with a valuable support system, enhanced our professional and social development, and opened doors for networking. We have primarily been involved in two different types of mentoring schemes and feel that each has its own benefits.

One was a tutor-led mentoring scheme where each student was assigned an academic tutor at the start of the program, with whom they had at least one formal meeting each semester. This was valuable as it provided all students with academic support and gave students the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns that they may not have otherwise addressed. This was made easier by having the same tutor throughout the program, ensuring a continuing and trusting relationship between the mentor and mentee. A significant advantage of this scheme was that all mentors were senior physicians and thereby helpful in providing advice and direction with regard to career development, good medical practice, student welfare, and professionalism.

The second was a student-led mentoring scheme where groups of 12 students were assigned four mentors (two males and two females). This was also introduced at the start of the program and was more informal; mentors could be approached as and when needed instead of having organized meetings. The mentors were all senior medical students with experience of the program, hence were able to relate to mentees, providing support and advice regarding social and personal issues. Additionally, having two mentors of each sex provided students with choice in regard to which mentor they approached. From personal experience, the student-led mentoring scheme was particularly useful in helping students to settle into the program, reducing anxiety, and encouraging students to raise any issues encountered.

Overall, we found both these schemes to be extremely useful and as discussed earlier, both have their own advantages. We believe that when developing a mentoring program, it is important to consider a combination of both schemes. Together, they not only provide

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a strong mentoring network, but also allow addressing of the full range of issues that students may encounter.

## Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

## Reference

1. Al Qahtani S. Students' knowledge of, and attitudes toward, mentoring: a case study at the Master's Program in Health and Hospital Administration. *Adv Med Educ Pract*. 2015;6:149–152.

## Author response

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## Dear editor

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to respond.

The authors in their letter to the editor stated a valid point. Their experience supported our finding about the benefits of mentoring. However, their observation came from different country and different level of education which I believe has to be validated by appropriate research.

The ease of mentorship is that it can be tailored as per the needs of the mentee, which also could become a disadvantage given the need for mentor at different levels of career, education, and their specific goals or needs. This means charting a certain guideline about mentoring is not easy, so is having a scale to measure it given all possibilities of bias.

The fact remains that at university level, the most important role the mentors can play is helping to decide/choose the career path as per the strengths/weakness of the mentee. In addition, it is very important that the mentee knows the need for improvement which is best achieved by one-to-one mentoring.

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The author reports no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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