Reviewer’s report

Title: Mentoring programs for medical students - a review of the PubMed literature 2000 - 2008

Version: 1 Date: 28 September 2009

Reviewer: Are Holen

Reviewer’s report:

This paper is based on criteria selected reviews of 14 + 11 = 25 papers out of 437, all from PubMed; they are covering Mentor programs for medical students. The selection criteria and selection process seem adequate. The selected reports are condensed into two tables and provide the reader with easy accessible write-ups of relevant issues.

However, the implementation of mentor programs in medical schools has several implications for the use of resources. Also, introduction of such programs may face some negative attitudes. Some of these issues are touched upon but should preferably be discussed in a more detail. Questions such as how many hours may be given to such programs in comparison to what is given to other subjects, what should be the qualifications of the faculty members mentoring single students or groups, will faculty development programs be necessary, what would be reasonable contributions from the students, what would be preferable focus areas of the programs, what would be the best timing, what are reasonable goals of the programs etc? A more systematic and in-depth discussion of the logistics and related topics would add considerably to the paper. I do not mean to say that the authors need to provide the answers to these and related questions, but the practical issues involved should preferably be addressed if strong recommendations are to be an essential part of the paper.

The authors conclude somewhat eagerly that “… mentoring should receive more appreciation in its impact on juniors’ career paths, as well as in its benefits for the mentors. As a quality characteristic medical schools should be monitored in respect of providing mentorships.” These are rather strong recommendations and they should preferably be given in a more balanced way. There is some, but limited support in terms of hard facts for the suggestions given. Recommendations should not be given just because they are “in”, representing the fad of the moment of the medical world. As it is now, I find that in this paper there is more enthusiasm for mentoring programs than a well-developed rationale and a sound cost-benefit analysis for their introduction. A clearer discussion of the advantages and challenges, costs and resources involved seems warranted if recommendations are to be an essential part of the paper. To me the authors have two ways to proceed, either play down the normative view that mentor programs are a "must" to modern medical schools and solely focus on the various ways mentoring programs have been shaped, or preferably, add a systematic in-depth discussion of the choices and challenged involved.
Abstract: Avoid “mentoring program” twice in the 3rd sentence. The Conclusion should be more critical and balanced.

Key words: I have the understanding that key words should NOT repeat words or expressions already in the title or abstract, but rather be alternative words likely to increase the number of hits from those doing searches. From this point of view, other key words would be warranted.

Introduction: no major comments.

Methods: The current set-up of points comes across as not the best way of presenting – steps (1) – (4), inclusion criteria 1- 4, categories 1 – 5, then again categories 1 – 4.

Results: The first paragraph should avoid repeating information already given. The text under the heading “Goals of the mentoring programs” seems to be summarizing matters in a superficial way which is not easy to grasp. I would suggest that this text is rewritten.

Discussion: A cleared distinction between the content of the 14 and the 11 papers would be helpful. When discussing program evaluations, criterion validity in relation to the stated goals would be expected. The authors seem not to recognize such an approach, but write that “… The reported results rather reflect general trends and not exact data.” This sentence and its context need clarification.

Table 1: I would suggest an alternative wording: Characteristics of fourteen mentoring programs for medical students (listed by….)

Table 2: Changes of the same kind.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.