Author’s response to reviews

Title: The positive impact of a facilitated peer mentoring program on academic skills of women faculty

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Adrian Alcroft
Executive Editor
BMC Medical Education

Dear Mr. Alcroft,

We are grateful to you and the reviewers for your further constructive comments on our manuscript, “The positive impact of a facilitated peer mentoring program on academic skills of women faculty”.

Please find below a point-by-point discussion of each comment offered in the most recent review. As you recommended, we also sent the manuscript through the Mayo Clinic Section of Scientific Publications to be copyedited.

COMMENT: There remain some inconsistencies in the description of the program and the processes involved in grouping the mentees. The methods section describes that participants were invited to participate in the project and asked to submit names of other faculty of similar academic rank with whom they wished to work. They then go on to say that: These faculty mentees were divided into 5 peer groups. Mentees who had signed up for the project were grouped by the organizers of the program to optimally match research and clinical interests based on their curriculum vitae and scholarly interests. However in the discussion it is stated that: Our intent had been to require the peers to self-identify their collaborators, and identify groups by chosen interest. Groups were constructed to reflect shared values, interests, and skill sets to as great an extent as possible. This highly structured approach, which allowed peers to choose their peer mentoring groups but did not require them to find their own mentor may have accounted for the successful outcomes of this project.

REPLY: Thank you for the opportunity to clarify our methods. We acknowledge that the foregoing is confusing, and in the revised version of the manuscript we have attempted to provide clarity. In effect, mentees were asked to help select peers within their group but were assigned mentors.

Results
COMMENT: While the outcomes of some of the participants are admirable, and clearly at least some of the participants found the group format and facilitator support very useful, it is still very difficult to understand whether the 9 publications were for 9 out of 17 participants, or whether some mentees were responsible for more than one of the publications (the qualitative data includes a quote that mentions ‘2 publications’). I also feel that the lack of clarify about the range of sessions across the 5 groups is problematic. Of the 5 groups, were there one or two that met more
consistently? Or out of each group were there a few mentees who consistently showed up for the group sessions? Despite this being identified as a limitation, not having any of this detail about the ‘dose’ of the intervention makes it difficulty to make a clear association between what it was about this program that allowed some of the participants to be successful.

Was there a trend towards those mentees who attended more consistently being the ones with more productivity? The qualitative comments are also presented in a way that makes it unclear about whether which groups the quotes came from, i.e. were there some groups in which mentees provided largely positive comments? Or were the positive and constructive comments from across all 5 groups?

REPLY: We appreciate the opportunity to clarify this very important aspect of the program’s results. Specific data regarding differences in number of manuscripts and other academic work produced by each peer group have been added at the end of the third paragraph in the Results section. Of the 5 groups, only 1 did not submit a manuscript. Furthermore, the sentence regarding coauthorship by peer group members was added to clarify how each peer group member had the opportunity for multiple publications, mentioned by a participant in the qualitative data.

In response to requesting further detail about the “dose” of the intervention, 2 clarifying statements were added to the Methods section. The first is in regard to participants’ signed agreements to remain active and engaged in their group. Second, under the heading Small Group Work, details regarding the allowed flexibility with scheduling and venue for meetings has been added. In the Results section, a fourth paragraph was added which reiterates the methods and also acknowledges that “data on the distribution of frequency or total number of hours the groups met are not available.”

In the Discussion section (paragraph 4), further comments regarding explanations for the variable outcomes among the mentoring groups have been added.

The qualitative comments were submitted anonymously through the large group survey of all participants; hence, we are unable to identify by group.

Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any further information or clarifications. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Prathibha Varkey, MBBS, MPH, MHPE