



Peer Mentoring Among Undergraduate Medical Students: Experience from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Peer mentoring is one of the mentoring essential components in any higher institution of learning. In the Medical Faculty of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), this mentoring system has existed long but has not undergone any formal evaluation. **Objective:** The main objective of this study is to determine the perception of peer mentoring among medical students of Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS), UNIMAS. **Method:** It was a cross-sectional study using self-administered questionnaire. All medical undergraduate students of FMHS were recruited. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 22. **Result:** A total of 234 respondents participated in this study. Peer mentoring system was preferred against other mentoring system. Majority of the respondents reported that academic gain was the main benefits they gained from peer mentoring system. Negative attitude of the mentee and poor time management for the meeting were the top two worst experience encountered by both mentors and mentees respectively. More than half of the mentor and mentee perceived that peer mentoring system was beneficial to them compared to other systems, with reason that the interaction between student themselves were more easier and comfortable. Nevertheless, there should be more interaction between the mentors and mentees. **Conclusion:** The findings indicated there is a positive contribution of peer mentoring towards the mentoring system of the faculty. There is a need to relook at the current mentoring system and consider peer mentoring to improve the student support.

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Introduction

Mentoring is a beneficial relationship between a mentor and a mentee, which highlights the progression of vocation and profession fulfilment for both of the mentor and mentee. It involves both of them, where their relationship is dynamic and evolving over the time [1,2]. Due to the

mutual benefits mentoring carries for both of the members, it plays a critical role in all stages of a person's career. In higher education, mentoring is very crucial since it helps new students to minimize their anxiety while standardizing and decreasing their restlessness, especially for those students who enter university for the first time [3,4]. It also helps to develop a positive attitude

and serves as a deterrent of risky youth behavior [5]. In medical schools, mentoring is critical for students to learn and model their professional behaviors, such as having good attitude, empathy for the patients and also the quality of being honest to themselves and others from their mentor [1].

However, peer mentoring also has its shortfalls. Unsuitable pairings in peer mentoring system is one of the common problems that can affect the academic performance of both mentees and mentors, when weak peer mentors are paired with weak mentees. In some circumstances mentees lost their confidence towards their mentors because of the poor quality of mentor's work [3].

Nevertheless, students found becoming a mentor has a rewarding experience. It is proven as literature had shown that mentees are expressed with altruistic reason in becoming mentors in their future [6]. As mentioned by Andrews and Clark [3], major key benefit for student peer mentor in peer mentoring system is by having the chance to obtain enhanced employability skills which enable themselves in providing helpful advices to their mentees and subsequently self-satisfaction is gained when mentors are able to help their mentees. By helping mentees, mentors can also gain self-confidence besides improve their own management, organizational and leadership skills.

In Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, peer mentoring system had already existed when the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) was established. It is known as the "buddy system". Unlike the structured mentor-mentee system established formally under the faculty, peer mentoring is informal and not officially implemented under the faculty medical curriculum. Nevertheless, the peer mentoring through informal feedback was well accepted among the medical students. All year 1 juniors to year 5 seniors participated in this system. Under this peer mentoring system, each of the participants has his or her own "buddy line", which connects and bonds the juniors and seniors

together. Unlike other mentoring systems, the participants of this peer mentoring system can take the role of a mentor and mentee at the same time. The objectives of peer mentoring include promoting and assisting students in academic and professional development besides producing positive role models. It also helps students to develop positive attitude and self-image, good communication and public relation skills, as well as widening the mentor and mentee's horizon and vision were also set to be the aims of this program.

Previous studies have drawn most attention based on mentees' perception and mentors' credibility and have less focus on students' role as mentor and mentee. Furthermore, most studies focused on assessment of formal establishment of mentoring system and little studies has been done on assessing the perception of both mentor and mentee in peer mentoring system, which has been established informally for some time though the focus of mentoring was on mentees. Therefore, the purpose of conducting this study was to determine the perception of mentor and mentee in peer mentoring. It is hope that the findings of this study would help us to understand the establishment of peer mentoring and further improve the mentoring system for the medical programme.

Method

It was a cross-sectional study was carried out among the medical students of Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS), UNIMAS from October of 2013 till January of 2014.

The calculation of sample size for the study was done by using Open Epi Software, version 3.01 [7]. Based on the total population of 519 students with the estimated prevalence from Hryciw et al. [8] research, where it was shown that 63% of the respondents yield positive result from the peer mentoring system, the minimum sample size needed was 234 (including 10% attrition). Based on the sampling frame by student cohort obtained from the Academic Office, all the year 1 to year 5 cohort would have equal number of