

Scholarly Mentorship and Publication: An Innovative Approach for Female Psychiatry Residents

Female physicians have remained proportionately poorly represented in the research academic track.¹ Opportunities for female residents to have an impact on the future of academic research may be considerable if early developmental characteristics are identified in a timely way.

We offered mentoring for female residents in an academic psychiatry department at McMaster University, a 5-year postgraduate training program, where research activities are not a requirement. Consecutively enrolled third-year female residents ($n = 5$), who underwent their 2-month core inpatient psychiatry rotation, were assigned to the same female faculty supervisor. This pilot project was conducted during a 12-month period starting August 2011. Women were asked the same question exploring their research interest: "Would you be interested in conducting a scholarly project during your current rotation, in which you will receive mentorship while you hold the first authorship position?" Four of 5 participants expressed motivation. Subsequently, all 4 participants have since become successful in publishing research articles ($n = 1$), case reports ($n = 2$), and letters to the editor ($n = 1$) to various high-quality peer-reviewed journals. An anonymous, electronic survey was sent to and completed by all those who successfully published to assess the perceived value of the mentoring project. We also analyzed research attitudes prior to and following outcomes of successful participation in scholarly activities; level of interest and research experience prior to and during residency; educational background; and factors that increased or decreased desirability of research, rather than the number of projects per resident. For 3 of 4 participants, the presence of at least one prior research residency experience and interest in and/or prior graduate degree were predictive of whether the subject would either be a published author or be active in current research.

In line with previous literature,² mentorship in research was important to all our participants; however, 2 subjects

did not have a preference for whether the mentor was male or female, only 2 held a prior graduate degree, and 1 affirmatively changed her opinion regarding pursuing an academic career after publication. As also shown in our findings, most residents find it difficult to conduct research because of various constraints³ (eg, patient care, lack of financial support, dedicated office space, and lack of support staff with biostatistics expertise). Dedicated mentoring faculty members with allowed protected time to administer, teach, and evaluate all research components may also need to be considered.

This strategy of scholarly mentorship appeared to be successful in the short term. Further evaluation of measurable outcomes will be necessary to fully determine their true impact. There are clear limitations to any interpretations deriving from such a small sample limited to one department in one institution; however, it does raise questions about women's research training in an academic program. It is evident that specific research mentoring is desirable during residency to facilitate the eventual research and academic success of academic female physicians. The authors advocate for more studies to explore the impact of exposure to early research mentorship.

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