

## Original research Article

# Students' perspectives on the mentorship program implemented for first year MBBS students: a cross sectional study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Medical profession is a transition stage from school life to college life where the students were subjected to vast changes in the syllabus, teaching and learning methods and a new environment with a new set of teachers and friends. As a result, many feel stressed and quite a few had dropped the course. To help the budding medics Kerala University of Health Sciences has started a Student Support and Guidance Programme under which we the first-year faculty arrange mentoring sessions for the first year MBBS students. The present study was intended to know the effectiveness of mentorship programme implemented for first-year MBBS students.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was carried out, among first-year undergraduate medical students of our medical college from January 2019 to June 2019. 110 students out of total 150 returned the filled questionnaire and this data was coded and entered in micro soft excel and analysed using SPSS version 2 software.

**Results:** Overall rating of the mentorship program signalled it as heart-warming for the students. Around 64% of students had an opinion that a mentoring programme is needed for all students.

**Conclusions:** In-depth sessions and more interactions with students might help the institution to harness responsible confident future doctors as they feel they are an asset to the institution and society.

**Keywords:** MBBS students, Mentorship programme, Kerala, Students support and guidance programme, Students' perspective

## INTRODUCTION

Fresh medics as they enter the medical profession will be in a transition stage from school life to college life where they were subjected to vast changes in the syllabus, teaching and learning methods and a new environment with a new set of teachers and friends. It had been found that students who were very good in academics were stressed and had low performance when they entered into the medical profession. To bring down the stress level in the first-year students and to increase their overall performance, a mentorship program had been

implemented from the first week of their academic life in most of the medical colleges. Though we were conducting mentoring sessions regularly, we were not sure whether the mentoring programme was having an advantage from students' perspectives. We knew there were a lot of benefits from mentoring sessions from the vast number of studies available and discussed below. Hence, we were really curious to know about our mentorship programme benefits and fallacies from students' perspectives. The previous studies had shown that the student-faculty relationship was important in relieving stress among students. The students were also benefiting from individual advice from their mentors

about their way of studies and their habits. Mentored students also had a higher rate of overall well-being. A mentor encouraged his or her mentee and was a role model in the mentee's personal development. Another study listed that their mentees showed good improvement academically due to mentoring sessions and mentors were satisfied with the academic results of their mentees.<sup>1</sup> Jennifer et al suggested that initial needs analysis followed by a serious decision-making process within the faculty was an important predictor for a successful mentoring program.<sup>2</sup> Differential mentorship may assist the promotion of diverse talents in medical students.<sup>3</sup> According to Whipp et al the mentors experienced improved levels of mentoring effectiveness and professional respect. Moreover, mentee outcomes included enhanced professional respect and confidence.<sup>4</sup> Arati et al in her study suggested that mentoring should be an essential part of medical training. Committed faculty and student mentors will find time for their mentees. Importantly, bonding and trust between teachers and students grew as a part of mentoring. Depending on needs and cultural backgrounds, each institution should encourage a mentoring program in their institutions.<sup>5</sup> To analyse the outcome efficacy of the program we wanted to know what the students expected from this program. For establishing an effective mentoring program, evaluation of the same was crucial. Hence the present study was undertaken as a part of program evaluation to analyse the students' attitude towards the mentorship program and to get suggestions from students for the betterment of the same.

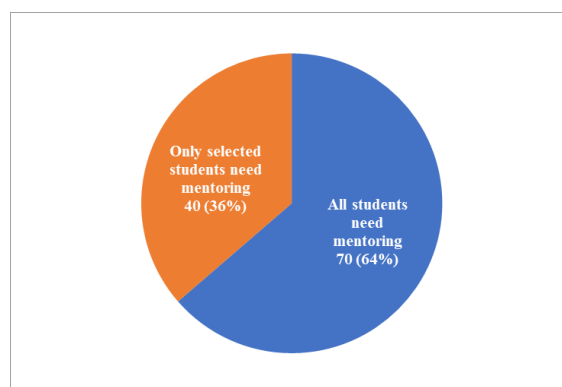
## METHODS

A cross-sectional study was carried out, among first-year undergraduate medical students of our medical college from January 2019 to June 2019. The study was conducted by questionnaire method. The self-administered questionnaire was validated by the subject experts and a pilot study was done among 10% of the study population. The first year MBBS batch (2018) consisted of 150 students per year. These students were divided into 15 groups according to their roll numbers and each group consisting of 10 students, were allotted to a first-year faculty as their mentor at the beginning of their course. These faculties were supposed to meet their mentees once a month. The present study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of this mentorship program. All 150 students were given a self-administrated anonymous questionnaire consisting of 15 questions on mentorship programme in Likert scale and one open-ended question to write their suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire was distributed after the second sessional exams so that they were in a position to opine about the mentorship program since they were exposed to the same for a period of 6 months. The students were asked to fill this questionnaire from their hostels and to return it within two days. Out of 150 students, total 138 students returned the questionnaire and 12 students did not responded to our questionnaire and

were excluded from the study. Out of 138 questionnaires, 28 of them which were not properly filled also excluded from the study. Total 110 completely filled questionnaire were included in the study and this data was coded and entered in Microsoft excel and SPSS version 20 software was used to do the statistical analysis. The institutional research body clearance was obtained before the start of the study and informed consent was obtained from each student.

## RESULTS

The filled-up questionnaires were analysed and the following results were obtained. Out of the total 110 students, 66 (60%) of them were females and only 44 (40%) of them were males. Exploratory statistical analyses found no differences between male and female responses to the Likert-scaled items (Table 1) in the questionnaire. Out of a total of 110 students, the majority (63.64%) opined that "mentoring was needed by all students", but 36.36% begged to disagree stating "only selected students need mentoring" (Figure 1). Out of the total 70 students (63.64%) who opined that "mentoring was needed by all students" majority of them 53 (75.7%) belong to female gender and out of total 40 students who told that "mentoring was needed for selected students" more than half 27 (67.5%) belong to the male gender. This difference was statistically significant (p value <0.001) (Table 2).



**Figure 1: Distribution of the study population on the need for a mentoring programme.**

Only 24 (21.82%) met their mentors regularly (at least once in a month). 74 (67.2%) never felt like meeting their mentor. 56.36% got motivated and relaxed after meeting their mentor. 40 (36.36%) were of the positive opinion regarding the need for a regular meeting of mentors with parents and 82 (74.55%) suggested that besides academics, personal problems should be enquired by mentors. 60 (54.55%) found improvement in academic performance through the help of mentors. 42 (38.18%) found mentoring helpful for improving behavior. 75 (68.18%) suggested that the option to choose the mentor should be given to the student, while 75 (68.18%) suggested that flexibility in time to meet the mentor should be present.

**Table 1: Data collected according to Likert scale.**

Questions	SD-1	D-2	N-3	A-4	SA-5	D%	D	N%	N	A%	A
All students need mentoring	1	13	26	46	24	12.73	14	23.64	26	63.6	70
Only selected students need mentoring	22	43	25	27	4	59.09	65	22.73	25	28.2	31
Used to meet mentors regularly	2	24	60	18	6	23.64	26	54.55	60	21.8	24
Feel happy on the day of meeting mentor	2	4	48	40	17	5.45	6	43.64	48	51.8	57
Never felt like meeting mentor	21	53	22	11	1	67.27	74	20	22	10.9	12
Gets motivated and relaxed after meeting mentor	1	4	42	43	19	4.55	5	38.18	42	56.4	62
Mentors should interact with parents regularly	3	20	41	32	8	20.91	23	37.27	41	36.4	40
Mentor should enquire about personal problems besides academics	2	7	17	62	20	8.18	9	15.45	17	74.5	82
Mentors helped to improve academic performance		8	39	44	16	7.27	8	35.45	39	54.5	60
Mentoring helped to improve behaviour	1	10	57	31	11	10	11	51.82	57	38.2	42
Should give an option to choose mentor	3	10	24	45	30	11.82	13	21.82	24	68.2	75
Time to meet mentor should be flexible	1	3	31	47	28	3.63	4	28.18	31	68.2	75
When under stress, meeting with mentor relieves tension		7	47	51	9	6.36	7	42.73	47	54.5	60
Mentor is equal to a good friend	1	10	49	35	14	10	11	44.55	49	44.5	49
Not gained much by mentoring program	18	42	28	21	2	54.54	60	25.45	28	20.9	23

\*Strongly agree-SA, Agree-A, Neutral-N, Strongly disagree-SD, Disagree-D.

**Table 2: Gender distribution of the study population on the need for a mentoring programme.**

Parameters	Gender distribution		Total	Statistical significance
	Female N (%)	Male N (%)		
Opinion that all students need mentoring	53 (75.7)	17 (24.3)	70 (100)	Chi-square value-19.8 p<0.001
Opinion that only selected students need mentoring	13 (32.5)	27 (67.5)	40 (100)	
Total	66	44	110	

**Table 3: Distribution of study population according to their opinion on the mentoring programme.**

Parameter on mentoring programme	Study population (n=110)	
	Yes N (%)	No N (%)
Meeting with mentor regularly	24 (21.8)	86 (78.2)
Never felt meeting their mentor	74 (67.2)	36 (32.8)
Motivated and relaxed after meeting	62 (56.4)	48 (43.6)
Improvement in academics	60 (54.5)	50 (45.5)
Improvement in behavior	42 (38.18)	68 (61.2)
Regular meeting of mentors with students parents	40 (36.4)	70 (63.6)
Beside academics personal problems should be enquired	82 (74.5)	28 (25.5)
Option to choose the mentor	75 (68.18)	35 (31.2)
Flexibility in time to meet mentor	75 (68.18)	35 (31.2)
Good option to relieve tension	60 (54.55)	50 (45.5)

Total 60 (54.55%) found mentorship a good option to relieve tension, especially when under stress. An equal number of students considered a mentor to be a good friend and neutral to that fact, while 60 (54.54%) felt no gain by the mentoring program (Table 1-3). For analysis, agree, strongly agree options were combined as “yes”

option and neutral disagree and strongly disagree as “no” option). The most common suggestion given by students was Mentee should be given the freedom to choose their mentors. Most of them also suggested that a mentor should meet at least once a month. Some of the students told that mentorship should be provided to only those who needed it (Table 4).

**Table 4: General suggestions on the mentoring programme from the study population.**

Suggestions
<b>Mentor should meet mentee at least once in a month<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>There should be general sessions on how to improve self-confidence and methods to deal with conflicts that we come across our campus life at least once in a month</b>
<b>Mentorship should be provided to only those who need it</b>
<b>Mentee should be given freedom to choose their mentors</b>
<b>Mentor should track students' performance and provide personalized feedback</b>
<b>Fixed time should be kept for meeting mentor</b>
<b>Mentor should be approachable through whatsapp since students find it easy to open their minds while messaging rather than speaking directly</b>
<b>Mentors should encourage mentee to form a study group among themselves and should follow them up</b>
<b>Mentors should enquire methods of studying and provide friendly attitude</b>
<b>Mentors and mentee should go for a trip to know each other</b>
<b>Need mentors from all the three departments</b>
<b>Fixed time of 30 minutes should be allotted to each mentee</b>

## DISCUSSION

In a study conducted by Maria Ghawji et al almost half the surveyed students believed that the mentorship program was helpful in their professional growth and grade improvement. When asked about possible mechanisms to improve the overall effectiveness of the program, the suggestions included better communication initiated by mentors, such as regular meetings. Most of the students identified a lack of motivation as the major hurdle in the program.<sup>6</sup> The present study also agreed with the above facts and about 70% agreed to the fact that the mentorship program was useful. According to Lauren Anderson, assessing the effectiveness of a given mentor was no easy task. Variability in learning needs and academic goals among scholars made it difficult to develop a single evaluation instrument or a standardized procedure for evaluating mentors. Scholars, mentors, and program leaders were often reluctant to conduct formal evaluations, as there were no commonly accepted measures. The process of giving feedback was often difficult and there was limited empirical data on efficacy. In their article, a new and innovative six-component approach to mentor evaluation which included the assessment of mentee training and empowerment, peer learning and mentor training, scholar advocacy, a mentee-mentor expectations, mentor self-reflection, and mentee evaluation of their mentor were done.<sup>7</sup> In the present study though we were not able to do a focus group discussion, mentees were given an option to reveal what they needed from a mentoring program and the results were almost satisfactory.

### Limitations

The study had the following limitations; focus group discussions could not be done because they were afraid about the confidentiality of the discussion process since they were still in first year and the mentors also belong to first year faculty. Sessional marks could not be taken to compare academic performance and influence of

mentorship program, as it will interfere with confidentiality and it might also give a false negative value suggesting mentorship was not needed because some of the toppers might not have attended any mentoring sessions. Feedback from faculty, parents and students of previous batches were not taken but if included might give a true reflection of the program. If a suggestion was asked in the beginning of the course about what they expected from the mentorship program and if they were circulated among the faculty who were allotted as mentors, there might have been a drastic improvement in the mentoring sessions.

## CONCLUSION

The introduction of newer measures like peer teaching, structured meetings and developing cordial relationships will help us to improve the mentorship program. The communication and motivation from a mentor and equal participation by mentee are the most important factors for the success of the program. Overall rating of mentorship program seems to signal it as heart-warming for the students but in-depth sessions and more interactions with students might help the institution to harness responsible confident future doctors as they feel they are an asset to the institution and society.

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