Women in Medicine Summer Intensive: A Pilot Professional Mentoring Program for Women Medical Students

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Background

The advocacy for women physicians’ equality and advancement is seen by some as unnecessary now that women make up approximately 50% of most medical school classes.

The focus of advocacy has now shifted to individual women focused on achieving “work-life balance.”

Studies show that women remain underrepresented in numerous areas of medicine and medical education.

Gender gaps in permanent leadership positions, promotions, tenure, salary and protected time highlight the need for continued professional programming specifically designed for women.

Objective

To evaluate the efficacy of a mentoring intervention focused on professional development for women University of Chicago medical students.

Methods

Curriculum development:

• Needs assessment via a class survey and program review at top twenty medical schools conducted to determine interest and relevance
• Pilot cohort (n=9) selected via essay-based application
• Content of applications utilized to identify skills of interest to the cohort and as basis for curriculum

Survey Analysis

• Quantitative statistics and qualitative coding were used to analyze Likert scale rankings of skill confidence gathered from both the cohort and nonparticipant students (n=111)

The 8-week pilot intervention consisted of two weekly meetings. The first meeting consisted of a student-led discussion on the current status, barriers and opportunities for women leadership as they pertained to a specific skill. The second meeting consisted of a physician faculty-led session that allowed for personal deconstruction of professional development through the utilization of workshops, round-table discussions and lecture based formats.

The physician faculty sessions were led by faculty ranging from senior resident to professor and dean level across the wide-ranging fields of primary care to transplant surgery. The curriculum was developed as an active participant model, and integration of real-time input was elicited from students and physicians through weekly online evaluations.

The central theme throughout the intervention was the investigation of professional skills and the unique considerations of their acquisition by women.

Skills gleaned from the cohort's applications were categorized into areas of professional development consisting of:

- Maintaining Self
- Negotiation
- Assertiveness in the Workplace
- Career Trajectory
- Self-Advocacy
- How to give, receive, and elicit feedback
- Leadership and Gender Inequality
- Ability to Say No: Managing Career Opportunities

Results

Intervention participants (n=7) showed statistically significant increases in confidence for 12 out of the 15 professional skills.

When compared to non-participant peers (n=34), intervention participants (n=7) showed statistically significant differences in confidence for 7 out of the 15 professional skills.

Conclusion

• Through interaction with senior faculty, participants were able to identify gender-specific considerations for the adoption of professional skills.
• Consensus was built around the realization that weakness in professional skills is not an inherent personal trait but rather a skill to be improved upon and practiced.
• Both qualitatively and quantitatively, women medical students felt more capable professionally as a result of their experience in this intervention.
• Medical students were able to articulate specific professional skills that were improved by their participation.
• The active participant based curriculum moved the relationship between student and faculty into an action and skill focused exchange and is a practical approach to the need for women specific professional development programming.

Future Directions

To study the cohort moving forward and assess whether the intervention shows statistically significant improvement for professional skills in comparison to the natural progression of skill improvement over a four year medical education.

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