

Academic Psychiatry Elective: Mentored Academic Leadership Development for Medical Students

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Received: 1 February 2015 / Accepted: 13 October 2015 / Published online: 20 November 2015
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Developing future leaders in academic psychiatry requires early engagement in the process of career identity development process. Increasing diversity within psychiatry and recruiting top-tier students into careers in psychiatry are additional needs. Several studies have cited elective experiences as important to recruitment into psychiatry as a specialty [1]. For many medical students, the clerkship experience does not provide sufficient exposure to the diversity of academic career paths available within psychiatry. Educational research and clinical teaching excellence are the foundation of a successful clinician-educator career track, but with a few exceptions, development of academic electives is not represented adequately in the literature [2]. To address these recruitment and career development needs, we designed an elective to expose students to the career path of academic psychiatry via mentored research experience, didactic activities, career development, and exposure to innovative academic clinical services. In this report, we describe the educational components, present results from the first cohort of medical students, and discuss implications for medical student education innovation.

Elective Description

The 1-month elective includes a mentor assignment with at least weekly meetings, participation in ongoing faculty development and residency didactic sessions (1.5 days/week), independent study (3 days/week), and a clinical rotation (0.5 days/week) at the Atlanta Veteran's Administration, Women's Center

of Excellence (VA-WCoE), which is an integrated care clinic serving women veterans where residents in psychiatry, obstetrics and gynecology, and family medicine co-manage patients along with medical students on the obstetrics and gynecology clerkship, physician's assistant students, and occasionally nurse practitioner students. All learners participate in weekly joint didactics in the integrated clinic. The prerequisite for this elective is completion of the third year medical student clerkship. In preparation, the elective students discuss their interests with the course director and receive suggestions for projects in their areas of interest that can be completed within the elective timeframe. Students receive formative feedback on progress toward their stated scholarly goal at rotation mid point. During the weekly clinical experience, they also are evaluated on clinical milestones with an emphasis on interprofessional communication. The course requires completion of a scholarly project, such as a written abstract of a case presentation, a clinical review of a topic, or an academic research project for eventual presentation at a local, regional, or national meeting (a written summary is required by the end of the elective). Students are also required to prepare a brief clinical teaching session (5–7 min) using a case example from a patient seen at the VA-WCoE. Students are given a summative pass/fail evaluation based on completion of required elements, with narrative descriptors of strengths and areas for further growth.

Preliminary Impact

At its first offering, four students requested this elective. The current case report presents a summary of the elective products of the two students who have completed the elective to date. Both students had identified intent to apply to psychiatry residency before the elective, and one student was responsible for advocating the development of this elective to expand

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internal opportunities for medical students. After completing the elective, one student decided to add a research elective to pursue an additional interest area using the mentoring experience to inform that process. The other student decided to develop the scholarly project from the elective into a formal educational research project which is ongoing.

The first project consisted of a lecture focusing on the diagnosis of depression with an emphasis on factors that may contribute to student depression. The lecture was created with the goals of increasing knowledge and self-awareness of depression among medical students during their initial exposure to psychopathology. The lecture reviewed the DSM-IV-TR criteria for major depressive mood disorder, treatment options, the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2/PHQ-9) screening tests for depression, statistics about physician depression, and contributing factors to medical student depression. The final presentation was recorded via Camtasia to be made available on Blackboard for asynchronous learning (a student-centered teaching method that uses online learning to facilitate information sharing outside the classroom) and for use by a broader range of course directors. During the course of the lecture, students are invited to perform a self-assessment using the PHQ-9 and encouraged to seek treatment if their score indicates a depressive disorder.

The second project involved evaluating a lecture versus jeopardy style interactive session to cover topics on cognitive disorders, eating, disorders, and forensic psychiatry. These topics were identified as areas of lower performance in clerkship exams. Feedback from students suggested that this content was more difficult to engage. The primary outcome would be medical student performance on pre- and post-test examination for each method and the secondary outcome would be performance on session content questions on the clerkship exam. The goal of this project was to determine which style of teaching is most effective in improving comprehension of lecture topics that are important to medical student education in psychiatry. Future goals were to conduct alternating rounds of traditional versus flipped lecture for clerkship students to get adequate sample size for analysis. Additional information on these two projects can be made available upon request.

Discussion

Academic psychiatry electives can be readily developed using a mentorship model. Incorporating flexibility in scholarly outputs allows educators to leverage existing faculty resources and promote collaboration between students and faculty. Close collaboration on a project also fosters mentoring, which is an important factor in recruitment of underrepresented minorities [3]. This report suggests that engaging fourth year medical students in education improvement is a useful strategy to recruit students as partners who can provide useful insights and promote teaching innovations using technology and novel learning strategies.

While this elective included opportunities for students to engage in ongoing policy, quality improvement, and clinical research projects, the finding that students were most interested in education improvement opportunities warrants further inquiry. As this was its first inception and initiated by one of the student co-authors, it is evident that the first students were highly motivated and interested in developing their “academic” skills. They also influenced the design of the elective in ensuring it was flexibly tailored but not completely unstructured like some “research” electives. In the next iteration, we will have more data to compare the type of learner who chooses this experience. We also hope that active promotion of the elective will help engage students who self-identify as undecided or leaning toward primary care.

These early findings of academic outputs created within a short elective and impact on development of the students involved will be explored as the elective evaluation process continues. We plan to collect qualitative student feedback about the elective and continue to monitor the type and quality of scholarly activity that emerges from participation. Published findings from established academic psychiatry electives are needed to advance best practices and identify approaches to career development for medical students interested in careers in medical education. Additional data are also needed to identify the impact of academic psychiatry elective experiences on recruitment into psychiatry.

Implication for Educators

- Including a mentored academic psychiatry elective will provide flexibility and tailoring to the career development needs of interested rising fourth year medical students.
 - Collaborations with medical students can foster development of education innovations.
 - Including clinical experiences with integrated care as part of an academic psychiatry elective is another strategy to promote engagement of medical students who may not be exposed to these programs in their clerkship rotations.
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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Disclosure On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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