

Academic Evaluation and Medical Student Advising: Conflict of Interest?

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Learning Communities in U.S. Medical Schools

Increasingly, U.S. medical schools have formed advisory colleges and learning communities to enhance student wellness and academic success.

Communities are enhancing communication, wellness, and collaborative education in medical schools.

They take on a different appearance in each school where they have been implemented.

Learning communities have focused on socialization and formal as well as informal learning.

The New York Times

A Medical School More Like Hogwarts

Doctor and Patient

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By PAULINE W. CHEN, M.D.



Learning Communities at Vanderbilt

In 2006, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine created four learning communities; these were initially called “Advisory Colleges”. The name was later changed to “Mentoring Colleges”.

Each of the four colleges is directed by two faculty mentors.

The key to the success of the colleges (learning communities) was the involvement of dedicated faculty leaders who exhibited passion for student learning and development.



Evolution of Learning Communities at Vanderbilt

Initially, the purpose of the colleges to promote wellness, a sense of community, and career counseling for students.

In 2011, the role of the colleges was expanded to include a new focus on education, in addition to wellness and career counseling.

Medical humanities and ethics also were taught.

A new emphasis on professionalism and leadership also was incorporated into the curriculum.

Effectiveness of the Mentoring Colleges:

Student satisfaction surveys

Success in the residency match

Academic outcomes

Student wellness



Composition of College Mentors:

- Dr. A. – co-director of Microbiology and Immunology Course
- director of Capstone Course
- Dr. B. - director of Pediatric Clerkship
- Dr. C - In charge of application/admission to anesthesia residency
- Dr. D -Director of Med/Peds residency
- Dr. E -Co-director of the Pediatric Clerkship
- Dr. F - Co-director of Internal Medicine Residency

Drs. G and H are also heavily involved in medical student education

Why did things turn out this way?

Faculty with an affinity for students and talent for teaching have arranged their professional lives to maximize contact with students.

Students in need of professional or personal guidance naturally gravitate to these faculty.

B. Medical Student Services

3. Health Services and Personal Counseling

MS-27-A. The health professionals at a medical education program who provide psychiatric/psychological counseling or other sensitive health services to a medical student must have no involvement in the academic assessment or promotion of the medical student receiving those services.

1. Academic and Career Counseling

LCME Standard MS-18.

There should be formal mechanisms at the medical education program for medical student mentoring and advocacy at each instructional site. The roles of various participants in the advisory system should be defined and disseminated to all medical students.

A medical student should have the option of obtaining advice about academic issues or academic counseling from individuals who have no role in making promotion or assessment decisions about him or her.

What does this mean?

Only that students in need of counseling or psychiatric services should have a person to go to for help that is not involved in their grades or promotion.

Students should be made aware of and encouraged to use institutional student counseling/mental health resources (e.g., campus psychological/counseling center).

Faculty who serve as advisors or mentors in learning communities may have no role as teachers if they might assign a grade or are involved in decisions regarding promotion.

What is a mentor?



Dictionary.com

1. a wise and trusted counselor or teacher.
2. an influential senior sponsor or supporter.

Wikipedia: a term meaning someone who imparts wisdom to and shares knowledge with a less experienced colleague.

TOM, MENTORING IS ABOUT MORE THAN ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO BE JUST LIKE YOU!



Discussion Questions

Is a trusting mentoring relationship compromised when the mentor is also a student evaluator?

Do students feel they lack a safe and non-judging place to turn to when they need help?

Are students who are not in a particular “college” or “house” disadvantaged because they lack the same personal relationship with a faculty member who may be inclined to facilitate the careers of students they know better?

Will an advising/mentoring system for students be less effective if prominent educators are excluded from the system?