Canadian Medical Education Journal
Revue canadienne de l'éducation médicale

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Favoriser équité, diversité, et inclusion dans les admissions aux écoles de médecine par des initiatives de mentorat d'étudiants en prémédecine

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Cite this article

Article abstract

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Favoriser équité, diversité, et inclusion dans les admissions aux écoles de médecine par des initiatives de mentorat d'étudiants en prémédecine

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Énoncé des implications de la recherche

ACCESS, un programme de mentorat dirigé par des étudiants et affilié à la Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, constitue une approche pratique et efficace pour lutter contre les inégalités dans l'enseignement médical. ACCESS offre un mentorat personnalisé et gratuit aux candidats méritants qui se heurtent à des obstacles sociaux, financiers et médicaux entraînant une sous-représentation dans les facultés de médecine. Notre modèle de mentorat présente des résultats significatifs en matière de candidature et d'entretien, ainsi qu'un retour d'information positif de la part des participants. Nous proposons ici un modèle reproductible pour les facultés de médecine du Canada. Ce document souligne l'efficacité des initiatives menées par les étudiants pour promouvoir la diversité et l'inclusion dans l'enseignement des soins de santé et vise à inspirer des programmes similaires, favorisant ainsi un futur personnel de santé plus diversifié et plus inclusif.

Introduction

Inequity in the Canadian medical education admission system is a complex issue relating to access, representation, and historic and current treatment of equity-deserving groups.[1,2] Prospective medical students face financial barriers, such as costs associated with applying to medical schools, and social barriers such as lack of mentorship and role models.[2] Beyond these, the additional work and responsibility of representing minority groups, microaggressions, and a history of exclusion within the medical community intensify the struggle.[2,3]

Despite Canadian medical schools implementing application pathways assisting equity-deserving groups in the admissions process, Black and Indigenous people remain underrepresented in Canadian medical education, as do those with medical, and financial barriers.[1,4]

Mentorship programs are one way of increasing interest of non-traditional students in healthcare careers.[5] Further, mentorship has been identified as a tool to increase representation of disadvantaged groups, who may feel 'out of the loop' regarding medicine as a career and the application process.[6] Additionally, mentorship has

reciprocal benefits; mentors report increased enthusiasm for teaching and meaningful self-reflection in their professional lives.[7] At present, most mentorship is either paid for or is obtained informally through an applicant's social network. ACCESS aims to change the status quo, by providing low-barrier to entry, zero-cost mentorship to equity-deserving students.

Innovation

At the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry (Schulich), located in London, Ontario, Canada, a student-led organization called Admissions Counselling and Coaching for Equitable Student Success (ACCESS) was created in 2021 to provide equity-deserving applicants to medical school with zero-cost mentorship through the admissions process by directly connecting them with current medical students from Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry. Additionally, we offer a scholarship to students to help them purchase MCAT preparation materials.

The process begins during the application cycle; ACCESS reaches out to current Schulich Medicine students to recruit them as volunteer mentors through email list serves, Facebook groups, and word-of-mouth. We ask mentors to tell us why they are interested in mentorship to assess their level of interest and also to help us guide a tailored mentor-mentee matching process based on similar life experiences and interest. Mentees are recruited through various platforms, including Reddit, Premed101, Facebook, and Instagram. Additionally, we have partnered with the Schulich Admissions Office to circulate the ACCESS registration form to interviewees. The registration form asks applicants about barriers they've faced in their path to medicine, previous interviews at Schulich, and if they have preferences for mentors, such as: 1) mature (older), 2) non-traditional (e.g. non-science degrees), 3) rural, and 4) person of colour. Mentors were asked about their barriers and their backgrounds, as well, to facilitate pairing. The pairing process prioritized mentee preferences, then was random. While the program has no financial costs, in-kind resources required include volunteer medical schools, access to Zoom or other video-calling software, design software and expertise for promotional material, and website development expertise. Website hosting expenses were covered through our school's stipend for ratified clubs.

Evaluation

ACCESS' inaugural mentorship cycle helped 79 equity-deserving students in January 2022. To date, ACCESS has supported 356 students, with 240 receiving written application support and 116 receiving interview support. ACCESS has enlisted 228 mentors throughout the three cycles of mentorship. This project was exempt from ethics review by Western University's Research Ethics Board.

After each mentorship cycle, surveys are sent to mentors and mentees. To date, 138 outcome surveys have been completed by applicants, with a cumulative response rate of 51%. Of survey respondents, 68% of were female, 81% completed a bachelor's degree, and 19% had or were completing a graduate degree. Additionally, 50% faced financial barriers, 66% faced sociocultural barriers, and 11% faced medical barriers. With 72% and 64% of ACCESS participants receiving an interview invitation or offer of admission, respectively and while Western University's medical school admission rate for the general interviewee pool is 40%, the ACCESS shows great promise.

In addition to outcome data, 180 feedback surveys were completed (118 by mentees; 62 by mentors) (responses are highlighted in Table 1). Regarding the application editing service offered in 2022, 50% (14/28) of mentors said that more time would have been better for reviewing the mentees applications. Mentees agreed, with 53% (20/38) expressing the same sentiment. As a result of this feedback, the 2023-2024 application mentorship cycle started two weeks earlier. Overall, mentees have expressed satisfaction with the ACCESS program, with one saying it "really helped to calm the nerves" and another saying they "want to help the next round of applicants."

Next steps and suggestions

The 2024-25 ACCESS has partnered with colleagues from the Dentistry school at Schulich to provide mentorship support to Dentistry applicants. Our next goal is to expand beyond Western University to develop a sustainable program that can affect widespread change in health care education. Additionally, we are collaborating with the Admissions Office to develop high quality Qualtrics surveys with REB approval to collect demographic data, outcome data, and feedback to allow for robust statistical and thematic analyses. This will be essential to truly evaluate the effectiveness of our mentorship program on mentee success. Key suggestions for faculty or students embarking on their own mentorship programs include early

collaboration with admissions offices, determining if mentor participation will exclude them from participating in official medical school interviews, applying for grants, and defining roles within the executive team for seamless transition of responsibilities to succeeding student cohorts.

Table 1. Highlights from feedback surveys completed by 118 mentees and 62 by mentors in the Schulich ACCESS program over 3 mentorship cycles.

Best Components of Program

- 93% of mentees rated the program as Very Good or Excellent
- 100% of mentors responded Yes or Probably when asked if they would volunteer to be mentors again.
- Mock sessions were representative and helped prepare interviewees. Mentees found it beneficial in calming their nerves and receiving feedback from multiple medical students at the same time
- Mentees were satisfied with the amount of interview practice they received with mentors
- Mentors expressed contentment with the organization and communication regarding the expectations and commitment needed for the mentorship program

Areas of Improvement

- 54% of mentees who received application support indicated that they would prefer to have more than 3 weeks of time for application editing with their mentor.
- Zoom technical difficulties during the Mock Interview due to large number of participants (resolved by using a Zoom business license provided by our faculty)
- Mentees want more mock-interview sessions (sessions with multiple interviews)
- Stricter guidelines regarding completion of essays by mentees and subsequent editing by mentors. Mentees and mentees, both, were sending and receiving essays at the last minute
- Mock sessions could be longer to accommodate more time for feedback

Additional Comments

- Mentors describe the program as a source of significant satisfaction ("able to give back", "guide mentees", "inspiring confidence in our future medical students")
- Some mentees expressed interest in networking events between applicants and medical schools
- Many new mentors are former mentees who express interest in giving back to the community ("I was a mentee… I want to help the next round of applicants"; "I'm looking to give back the gift I received to next year's meds class")

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