

Peer Research Mentoring for Medical Students in India

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Date submitted: 23-February-2024

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Citation: Lalwani D, Shirpurkar A, Lanjewar I, Parekh P, Agrawal M, Deshpande A, et al. Peer research mentoring for medical students in India. *Educ Health* 2024;37:95-96.

Online access: www.educationforhealthjournal.org

DOI: 10.62694/efh.2024.19

Published by The Network: Towards Unity for Health

Dear Editor,

In Indian undergraduate medical education, there is a paucity of structured research training, difficulty in finding mentors, and limited access to necessary resources. These challenges lead to limited interest and lack of active involvement in research.^{1,2}

To address this, our research interest group initiated an educational program “Med Shark Tank,” (inspired by the reality television show), which aimed to inspire research interest by providing a platform for medical undergraduates to learn about research methodology using peer mentors.³

The methodology involved mentor selection based on academic research experience, mentee allocation through a random process, and a 10-day structured curriculum covering key areas of research. The program's primary objective was to instill foundational concepts and critical thinking, culminating in mentee groups presenting well-defined research questions to a panel of judges.

Research questions were judged based on needs analysis, clarity of research question, novelty, impact, research methodology, feasibility, and response to follow-up questions. The top five abstracts from the screening round advanced to the final round, where each team presented their research ideas for 10 minutes, addressing various criteria.

The results saw diverse and impactful research topics, with the winning project focusing on the effect of perinatal factors on the risk of postpartum

depression in mothers. To incentivize participation, the program offered rewards, including coverage of ethical committee fees as first prize.

Participant feedback was highly positive, with appreciation given for the structure, relevance, and effectiveness of the program. The program also increased self-reported research knowledge and heightened interest in research. Quality of mentoring was also highly rated.

The peer mentorship program is a promising model for cultivating research skills in undergraduates. Its comprehensive approach—which includes hands-on practice, and competition—effectively engages participants, encouraging the pursuit of active research with its unique structure involving presentation (with feedback of a preliminary idea) to judges, who potentially could serve as principal investigators.

Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the initiative's lasting impact on academic and career paths. The model is limited by a condensed timeline for idea generation and presentation; a longer timeline would perhaps enhance participant understanding, needs analysis, and proposal refinement.

The proposed model is a successfully piloted starting point, hopefully inspiring additional research exploring the implementation of near-peer discussions throughout the entire medical research process.

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