

Ensuring Success of a Residents-as-Mentors Program: Promoting Mentor Availability

In the article “Residents as Mentors: The Development of Resident Mentorship Milestones,” Khan and colleagues¹ stressed the importance of mentorship of near-peers in residency for career development and personal well-being. They also recommended guidelines and milestones for successful residents-as-mentors programs, citing *mentor availability*, *competence*, and *altruism* as the most important characteristics of such a relationship, based on surveys of residents. While many residency programs have a similar “buddy”-type program between junior and senior residents, very little has been published about specific aspects and the efficacy of these interventions.

We believe that when residents are both mentors and mentees, the article’s first milestone of mentor availability is the keystone of the entire program. After all, 80-hour workweeks, 24-hour calls, 1 day off in 7 days, and coverage over multiple hospitals of a health system are not conducive to regular mentorship meetings between residents. Without ensuring adequate time for mentorship interactions in busy resident schedules, we fear that the intended effect on career development and personal well-being may be limited.

Below we expand on Khan and colleagues’ first milestone of mentor availability by providing 7 strategies that residency program leadership may use to maximize benefits of a residents-as-mentors program.

- Strategy 1: Pair mentors and mentees who live geographically close to allow for after-hours casual meetings.
- Strategy 2: Allow for 1 morning or lunch teaching conference per 1 to 2 months to be protected time for a mentorship meeting.
- Strategy 3: Encourage real-time communication via informal e-mails, text messages, and telephone calls rather than just through formally scheduled meetings.

- Strategy 4: If the program allows for an X + Y schedule, pair junior and senior residents in the same block so that their inpatient and outpatient schedules align for easier meeting times.
- Strategy 5: Encourage mentor-mentee pairs to organize social and/or group mentorship outings with other pairs to expose junior residents to other senior resident mentors as interests evolve.
- Strategy 6: Assuming the senior mentor’s schedule is more flexible than the mentee’s, encourage the mentor to meet the mentee at the mentee’s hospital location at the end of a shift for mentee convenience.
- Strategy 7: Provide a list of topics that prior mentees have wanted to discuss, separated by time of year, to serve as conversation starters at regular intervals.

Organizational and financial efforts to enhance the mentorship experience between near-peers in a residency program only achieve their highest potential when the mentor and mentee are able to engage in frequent interaction. We applaud Khan and colleagues for seeking to create guidelines for a successful mentoring relationship, and we believe that the strategies listed here can aid in maximizing both the frequency of, and payoff from, interactions between residents as mentors and mentees.

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Reference

1. Khan NR, Rialon KL, Buretta KJ, et al. Residents as mentors: the development of resident mentorship milestones. *J Grad Med Educ.* 2017;9(4):551–554.