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Mentorship for medical students - space for something else

AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

som för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen vid Karolinska
Institutet offentligen försvaras i Södersjukhusets aula.

Fredagen den 12 april 2013, kl 9.00

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Stockholm 2013

ABSTRACT

Mentorship has been used in undergraduate medical education to support students' learning and development. The medical education literature describes various goals for mentoring, various designs of mentoring programs, and various roles and functions of the mentor. The *aim* of the thesis was to deepen the understanding of the meaning of mentoring for medical students' professional and personal development and to contribute new knowledge that will be useful when designing mentoring programs for medical students in the future. Students' experiences of two forms of mentoring were explored in four consecutive studies in Europe. Theories of professional competence, learning, and transition were used for the interpretation, understanding, and explanation of the findings.

Studies I and II explored experiences of one-to-one mentoring during the first clinical courses, semesters 5–8. In *Study I*, a questionnaire showed that the students felt that the mentorship had facilitated their professional (78%) and personal (63%) development. They felt respected by their mentors, and the role of the mentor was experienced as being supportive and providing guidance and perspectives. In *Study II*, their experiences were further explored by means of interviews. Three themes were found: *Space*, *Belief in the future*, and *Transition*. Having a mentor gave a sense of security and constituted a “free zone” alongside the educational program. It gave hope about the future and increased motivation. The students were introduced to a new community and began to identify themselves as physicians. The mentorship created conditions to start to develop the more “elusive” professional competences, such as reflective capacity, emotional competence, and the feeling of belonging to a community.

Studies III and IV further explored experiences of mentorship using interviews concerning combined group and one-to-one mentoring during semesters 1–11. In *Study III*, five themes were found about what the mentorship created opportunities and space for; *Psychosocial support by the mentor*, *A relationship with a physician beneath the professional surface*, *Space for something else*, *Awareness of one's own development*, and *Reflection and learning with peers*. The mentorship created space for reflection on the humanistic aspects of the professional role. A mentoring relationship can be on a personal level without frequent meetings and knowing one another well. Continuity helped the students to recognize their own development. *Study IV* focused on the transitional process of becoming a physician. The analyses resulted in three themes: *Integrate oneself with the future role as a physician*, *Exciting clinical experiences with the mentor give incentives to learn*, and *Toward understanding the professional competence of a physician*. The mentorship enabled the students to get a view of their future lives and start to integrate the professional role with themselves as persons. Early access to the clinical environment with the mentor was an incentive and gave meaning to the theoretical knowledge. Their understanding of professional competence and behavior evolved and they advanced toward understanding the wholeness of the profession.

In conclusion: mentorship can facilitate medical students' professional and personal development by creating *space* for reflection and development of the more “elusive” competences of a physician, by giving *incentives* to learn, and by facilitating the students' process of *becoming* a physician.