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Speed dating for mentors: a novel approach to mentor/mentee pairing in surgical residency

Akia D. Caine, MD,a Jacob Schwartzman, MD,a and Anastasia Kunac, MD, FACSb,*

a Division of General Surgery, Department of Surgery, Rutgers-New Jersey Medical School, Newark, New Jersey
b Division of Trauma and Surgical Critical Care, Department of Surgery, Rutgers-New Jersey Medical School, Newark, New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

Background: Resident-resident mentoring offers significant benefits. Previous works have shown that the quality of the mentorship pairing is important, but techniques of pairing have seldom been described. We describe a system for mentor-mentee pairing that we call “Speed Dating for Mentors” (SDM).

Methods: The SDM activity took place in an academic general surgery residency program in the Northeast. Senior residents met with junior residents (JR) in 90-second intervals. On completion of interviews, residents documented their top three choices—this was used to create senior-junior resident pairings. A cross-sectional Likert survey was conducted with univariate analysis of satisfaction with the SDM event.

Results: Forty-two surgical residents participated in SDM—23 junior residents and 19 senior residents—resulting in 23 mentor-mentee pairings. Fourteen pairs were generated, where both mentor and mentee were among top three choices, seven pairings generated where either/or was a top three choice, and two pairings were assigned; six pairs were assigned for nonattendees. A total of 36 surveys were completed—28 (78%) respondents participated in SDM compared to eight (22%) who did not. Eighty-five percent of respondents who attended were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their pairing compared to only 12% of nonattendees (P = 0.001).

Conclusions: “Speed dating” is a novel approach to forming mentorship pairings and identifying mentors/mentees with similar interests. Residents who attended the event were satisfied with the event and with the outcome of their mentor/mentee pairing. Further investigations are warranted to determine what effects resident mentoring has on resident performance, stress levels, and well-being.
Introduction

Mentoring in academia has been utilized as a method of providing individualized guidance. The subject of mentoring has been studied in various individual disciplines, thus leading to a lack of research in how to form substantial mentoring relationships and the characteristics of those pairings. Current data show that good mentoring relationships have positive effects on academic growth, promote self-learning and investigation, and provide protection from negative interactions. On a personal level, mentors provide mentees with an outlet for expression of feelings and a source of support. Good mentors are honest and adept at active listening, and good mentoring relationships are those that comprise of mutual respect, trust, and confidentiality.

There is very little research in academic mentoring that involves the process of creating mentorship relationships and pairings. In the absence of a structured mentoring program, potential mentees have to find mentors and initiate relationships on their own; this can prove to be difficult. In programs where mentors are assigned rather than “self-identified,” there can be negative implications—participants may feel forced into a relationship that lacks any chemistry or common ground. Self-identification of mentors, on the other hand, is seen as a more beneficial method of creating a mentor-mentee pairing, as it allows for a more comfortable and natural relationship to form. In academic medicine programs that do not allow mentees to choose their own mentor, both mentees and mentors believe that being able to choose would be important in forming an ideal pair.

Accommodating for the multiple characteristics and experiences of a mentee is difficult but can be accomplished with multiple mentors. Having resident mentors can very much supplement the mentoring done at the attending level. Senior resident mentors aid in personal and professional growth of junior residents (JR) by being able to intimately understand the junior resident perspective because they recently had those same experiences. Knowing that self-identified pairings can be especially beneficial, we devised a simple technique for pairing junior resident mentees with senior resident mentors. This method is based on the mainstream concept of “speed dating,” which has been traditionally used to allow participants to sample many people in a reasonable amount of time for the purpose of forming personal relationships. Herein, we describe our method and experience with “speed dating for mentors” and hypothesize that this is a useful technique for pairing junior resident mentees with senior resident mentors in a surgical residency program.

Methods

The “speed dating for mentors” (SDM) activity took place in an academic general surgery residency program in the Northeast consisting of 29 postgraduate year (PGY) 1-2 JR and 28 PGY 3-5+ senior residents. The residents rotate at four hospitals, some at remote locations. Thus, not every resident in the program attended the event. The event took place in a lecture hall used for didactics during educational protected time, where residents are free from clinical duties. Residents were given an introduction to the purpose of the event and format as well as instructions. Senior residents were asked to move consecutively in 90-second intervals from one seated junior resident to the next. During the 90 s, the residents were to converse and become acquainted with one another such that all JR new to the program met with every single senior resident in attendance. On completion of all interviews, both junior and senior residents were given a worksheet to list their first, second, and third choices of mentor or mentee, respectively, and a rationale for why they wanted to be paired with that resident. The associate program director used the worksheets to create mentor pairings based on the residents’ preferences. Mentorship pairings were announced via email.

A cross-sectional written survey with Likert-type responses was then conducted at an educational session during resident protected time 4 wk after the SDM event. Survey completion was completely voluntary. The survey collected demographic data on whether the respondent was present at the SDM event and their postgraduate year. Survey questions asked about satisfaction with the SDM event, satisfaction with their mentorship pairing, and satisfaction with previous mentor pairing (which were assigned and did not utilize the SDM technique). Additional questions focused on the importance of various characteristics of a mentor/mentee such as race/ethnicity, gender, PGY level, and interests.

Descriptive statistics are presented as counts with proportions for all outcome variables. Univariate analysis comparing attendees with nonattendees in terms of mentor pairing satisfaction rates was performed using exact chi-squared tests to compare groups. Within attendees, previous and current mentor pairing satisfaction rates were dichotomized into a binary outcome, with “very unsatisfied,” “unsatisfied,” and “neutral” being considered an unsatisfactory pairing and with “satisfied” and “very satisfied” being considered a satisfactory pairing. The proportion of attendees with previously satisfactory mentor pairings was compared to the proportion with currently satisfactory mentor pairings using Fisher’s Exact test. Due to the low number of non-attendees, previous and current satisfaction rates were not compared within this group, and more sophisticated analysis comparing selected versus chosen mentorship was not possible. For all comparisons, a P value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. SAS, version 9.4, was used for all statistical analysis.

Results

A total of 42 surgical residents participated in SDM—23 JR and 19 senior residents; 73% (42/57) of the total residency class. Figure 1 describes the distribution of the study participants within the study design. Twenty-three pairings were created from the worksheets completed by residents who attended the event. Fourteen pairs were generated where both mentor and mentee were among top three choices, seven pairings generated where either the mentor or mentee was a top three
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