

Medical Education Research

‘Student-led, near-peer mentoring: an analysis of student utilization of mentorship before and during the COVID-19 pandemic’

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Background: The Navigating Medical School (NMS) program is a student-led, near-peer mentoring program that provides academic, career, and wellness guidance to Wake Forest School of Medicine (WFSM) medical students at critical times during their academic careers through: (1) regularly-scheduled seminars, (2) near-peer guides, and (3) networking platforms.

Objectives: This study aimed to examine both (1) WFSM medical students’ utilization of mentorship and (2) participation in NMS before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Two online surveys were emailed to all WFSM medical students in the MD program both in April 2020 (n=570) and December 2020 (n=607) asking students to describe mentorship utilization during 2019-2020 (pre-COVID) and 2020-2021 (during-COVID) academic years, respectively. Students reported which mentors they consulted for advice on (1) academics, (2) board exam preparation, (3) career decisions, (4) personal life, and (5) community involvement. Mentors were classified as either: same-level student, upper-level student, resident, fellow, attending, or family/partner/non-medical friends.

Results: Response rates for the before and during COVID-19 surveys were 20% (112 of 570) and 19% (117 of 607), respectively. The most attended NMS events were the “Guides Match Day” (20% and 33%, before and during COVID-19, respectively) followed by “meetings with guide/guidee for both academic years” (19% and 27%, before and during COVID-19, respectively); however, overall attendance declined from 83% before to 62% during COVID-19. The number of mentors per student did not change before to during COVID-19 (median: 3; range: 1-18). Respondents turned primarily to same-level medical students for guidance on life outside of school, academic performance, and community involvement; however, they sought upper-level students for USMLE Step exams. Whereas

before COVID-19, respondents mostly sought guidance regarding academics (24%) and personal life/wellness (18%), during COVID-19 they sought guidance on academics (28%) and career development (26%). A notable 37% and 22% of students reported seeking no guidance before and during COVID-19, respectively.

Conclusions: While NMS provides near-peer guidance for students, their needs are multi-dimensional and may change in the face of major events such as COVID-19. New strategies may be needed to overcome limitations to NMS events during these unprecedented times, and to ensure students receive guidance.