Improving Recruitment and Retention of Female Faculty through Innovative Programming Provided by a Women in Medicine and Science Group

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MISSION

Medical schools and graduate schools have seen an increase in the number of female applicants and graduates, but this has not translated into an increased number of female faculty leaders in academia. The lack of a local program to mentor women early in their education to become leaders in their field was identified.

The University Of South Dakota Sanford School Of Medicine has recently embarked on a program for faculty development through a Women in Science and Medicine program. This program has had early successes in faculty development programming and community outreach, but its most innovative and successful endeavor has been a mentorship program that has extended itself through multiple educational levels.

INNOVATIVE APPROACH

The University of South Dakota Women in Medicine and Science (USD WIMS) group started actively developing programming designed both to retain and recruit women faculty members as well as to develop a pipeline of future women in STEM fields in 2013. Programming included faculty development sessions that were designed based on a “needs-assessment” survey, sessions specifically aimed at medical students and residents for developing career goals, community outreach programs geared towards encouraging girls to participate in STEM programs, and, a multi-tiered mentorship program.

The most innovative aspect of the mentorship program is its extension from medical school down towards undergraduate students. Currently, women faculty members are mentoring women medical students who in turn are mentoring women undergraduate students. There is also a new outreach effort that will encourage girls to participate in STEM programs, and, a multi-tiered mentorship program.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM DESIGN

The pilot mentorship program began by establishing mentee-mentor relationships between women medical students and women faculty members. At many institutions mentors are assigned to medical schools based solely on specialty interest or done completely at random. This mentorship program took a unique approach to matching up mentors to medical students. Mentors and mentees each completed mini biographies. Mentors answered a few questions about their educational background, chosen medical specialty and current practice, hobbies and family life, and anything else unique about their medical career. Mentees answered similar questions about their family and personal life, hobbies, and future medical goals including specialty interest. A matching process was then used by which the mentors and mentees were paired with as many similarities in common as possible. This was designed for the mentor and mentee to form a more personal, lasting relationship.

FEEDBACK

“...I was blown away by the effort and mindfulness by which you organized our mentorships. I honestly think that I will be grateful for my mentor for the rest of my life...I can just tell.”

RESULTS

We have paired 62 medical students with 42 faculty physicians spread through our 4 campuses as mentor-mentee pairs. These pairings have been successful in starting several research projects, writing abstracts, being invited to present at meetings and other successes. The program has proven so worthwhile and popular, that 42 additional medical students have requested mentors in 2014. In its pilot year, medical students have been able to establish goals with their mentors and obtain career advice. Most medical students are now working towards gaining professional development as well as seeking help with residency applications.

REFERENCES

