

The Key Areas and Unmet Need of Mentorship Programs in Indian Dermatology: A Survey Based Analysis

Abstract

Background: Mentorship programs for dermatologists have been in vogue in the West for many years, but have been on a hiatus in India. Recently, there is renewed interest, and mentorship programs are gaining momentum across the country to guide and nurture young dermatologists to attain their full potential. However, what constitutes an ideal mentorship program is still an enigma. **Materials and Methods:** We developed a multiple-choice questionnaire (Google-form), enquiring post graduates and dermatologists about their general opinion of mentorship, its key areas and what constituted an ideal mentorship-program. These were distributed via email and WhatsApp and responses were collected over a month's period. The statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows. **Results:** We received 202 responses and majority of the respondents were private practitioners (32.2%) and post graduate students (29.7%). Respondents felt that mentorship should be undertaken at the beginning of postgraduation (37.1%) or just after its completion (23.8%), and should focus on academic and research related issues (55.0%). Communication (95.5%) was an important factor for the program to be successful, and on an average, must be of seven weeks duration, with a mentor : mentee ratio of 1:2. We found a significant association between the designation of the respondent and their perceived ideal time for a mentorship program ($P < 0.001$, Chi Square Test), seeking of mentorship beyond the program duration ($P < 0.01$, Chi Square Test) and the type of mentorship program ($P = 0.01$, Chi square test). **Conclusion:** Our survey concluded that a well-planned short mentorship program of six to eight weeks duration with a low mentee to mentor ratio with an informal style of mentoring in the formative years of one's career would be suitable in the Indian Dermatology scenario. Communication and availability emerged as important elements for a successful mentor mentee relationship. The positive effects of a well-planned mentorship program extend beyond its duration and enrich both the mentor and mentee.

Keywords: Dermatology, IADVL, India, mentees, mentors, mentorship

Introduction

The concept of Guru and Shishya stems from the Gurukul system of teaching where the Shishyas (mentees) acquired skills, knowledge, and life lessons from their Guru (a wise, learned, and experienced mentor). Mentoring is an art, wherein the mentor prunes and nourishes the protégé to evolve into their fullest potential. The mentor and the mentee both gain immensely in their professional and personal spheres due to a mutually reciprocal relationship.

The success of a mentorship program depends on a multitude of factors that need to be hand-crafted to achieve the optimal results.^[1] Other areas of importance for a satisfactory experience include the ideal duration, structure, and the mentor-mentee

ratio. Although, in vogue for quite some time in the West, mentorship programs in India had taken a back seat. Recently, however, there has been a renewed interest and cropping up of mentorship programs.^[2] Many international dermatological societies and associations have been running successful training programs both virtual and physical for interested candidates with assigned mentors, this has also recently started gaining momentum in the field of Indian dermatology. We thus conducted this survey to see what the general opinion, key areas, and unmet need is regarding mentorship among dermatologists in India.

Materials and Methods

The preliminary questionnaire regarding the key areas and unmet need of mentorship

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programs was prepared by SK and VNR. This was later reviewed by the expert RS and a psychometrician to establish face validity. This was then pilot tested among a few mentors and mentees of mentorship programs including some from the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL) GuruDerma mentorship program. After data entry, cleaning, and principal component analysis, Cronbach Alpha was calculated and the final questionnaire was prepared. This Google form (Google Inc., California, USA) based questionnaire [Supplementary Table 1] was disseminated via email and WhatsApp groups (WhatsApp LLC, California, USA) on June 1, 2022 to residents and dermatologists across the country to elicit their opinion. Potential respondents included residents in various semesters of their training, junior and senior practicing dermatologists; tutors and professors of varying seniority, and retired dermatologists. Submission of responses was closed on July 1, 2022.

The questions were divided into four sections—collecting the information regarding the respondents; general opinion on mentorship; assessment of the importance of key areas of mentorship; and what would be an ideal mentorship. These were multiple-choice based and few had more than one option that could be selected. There was also a feature to suggest any additional area that participants felt was important.

Data was entered into Microsoft Excel and was cleaned for errors. It was then coded and anonymized and a master sheet was prepared.

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows. Continuous variables were presented as mean with standard deviation. Categorical variables were expressed as frequencies and median. Interesting data was characterized as bar charts. Categorical data was analyzed with Chi-Square or Fisher Exact test. All statistics were performed with two-tailed test, P value <0.05 considered as significant.

Results

The form was viewed by 2452 participants and there was a total of 202 responses [Table 1, Supplementary Table 2], giving a response rate of 8.2%. The median age of the participants was 32 years (range 24–76), and there was a female predominance (male:female ratio 69:133). Most of the respondents were consultants in private practice (32.2%) and postgraduate students (29.7%). Only 9.4% participated in prior mentorship programs, all of them finding it beneficial and with 26.3% of them having participated in more than one program. Most felt that the ideal time of mentorship should be either during the beginning of postgraduation (37.1%) or after postgraduation (23.8%). The majority (87.1%) would be willing to seek guidance from the mentor after the duration

of the program. Most preferred specific mentorship (54%) with the most popular programs being those that address academic and research-related issues (55%), career growth and development (53.5%), and enhancing clinical competency and personal growth (53%).

Participants felt that communication (95.5%) and availability (92.6%) were most important for a successful mentor–mentee relationship. The majority (65.8%) of the mentees would address a difference of opinion with their mentors. Nearly three-fourths (72.8%) felt that the need of mentoring has increased in the postpandemic era. Most (89.1%) felt that the learning is two-way, with the mentor also learning from the mentee. Most respondents felt that the most important way a mentorship would be beneficial would be an improvement in career growth (74.3%), and academic growth (72.3%). A hybrid modality of mentorship was most preferred (45.0%) followed by an in-person one (31.7%). Most preferred a meeting frequency of once per month (27.2%) or twice a month (24.8%). The ideal duration of a mentorship program was found to be on an average for 7.1 ± 1.4 weeks (Median 8), with a median of two mentees at a time. The preferred style of mentoring was an informal/natural one (69.8%). In cases of international mentorship, most preferred mentors are from the United States of America (59.4%), and the United Kingdom (45.5%).

The age of the mentor and the remuneration received were less important as per the respondents [Figure 1].

There was a significant association between the current designation of the respondent and the perceived ideal time for a mentorship program ($P < 0.001$, Chi-Square Test). Most postgraduates (70.0%), Professors (53.8%), Associate Professors (45.4%), Senior Residents (37.5%) preferred their mentorship period during the beginning of postgraduation, and consultant dermatologists at the beginning of their practice (41.5%).

A significant association was also seen between the designation and whether they would seek advice from the mentor post the program ($P < 0.01$, Chi-Square Test). All retired respondents, 23.1% of Professors, 18.1% of Associate Professors, and 13.3% of postgraduates said that they may seek advice from the mentor after the program.

The designation of the respondent had a significant association with the type of mentorship preferred ($P = 0.01$, Chi-square test). Most Professors (69.2%), Assistant Professors (88.2%), Associate Professors (80.0%) preferred general mentorship programs to specific ones.

Discussion

In a survey conducted among residency program directors in the United States, 81% of the respondents felt that mentorship played a “somewhat” or “very important” role in their own career development.^[3] In our survey, we found

Table 1: Summarizing the important responses obtained from the survey

Question	Number (percentage)
Age in years	35.48±11.1 (Median: 32, R: 24–76)
Gender ratio (male:female)	69:133
Current position (%)	
Consultant (Private practice)	65 (32.2)
Postgraduate student/Resident	60 (29.7)
Is there a need for mentorship programs in dermatology in India	
Yes	199 (98.5)
No	2 (1.0)
No comment	1 (0.5)
When would be the ideal time for a mentorship program?	
Postgraduation beginning	75 (37.1)
After postgraduation	48 (23.8)
Would you prefer a general mentorship program (encompassing multiple areas) or a specific one	
Specific	109 (54.0)
General	92 (45.5)
Either	1 (0.5)
If specific what would the program of your choice be? (Multiple correct)	
Academic and Research related	111 (55)
For career growth and development	108 (53.5)
Which according to you is the most important aspect for a successful mentor–mentee relationship? (multiple correct)	
Communication	193 (95.5)
Availability	187 (92.6)
Which of the following is the most important way a mentorship program will be beneficial? (Multiple correct)	
Improves career growth	152 (74.3)
Improves academic growth	146 (72.3)
Build self-confidence/self-esteem	141 (69.8)
Builds a long-lasting bond	138 (68.3)
Gives you a role model	131 (64.9)
Helps in networking	123 (60.9)
Frequency of meetings	
Once a month	55 (27.2)
Twice a month	50 (24.8)
What is the ideal duration of a mentorship program in weeks?	7.1±1.4 (Median 8, 4–8 weeks)
Number of mentees at a time (Median, range, IQR)	2, 1–5, 2
Which style of mentorship (more than one)	
Informal/Natural	141 (69.8)
Formal	66 (32.7)
Situational mentoring	58 (28.7)
Supervisory	44 (21.8)
Tele mentoring	36 (17.8)
Group	28 (13.9)

that the major motivation of respondents for a mentorship program was guidance in research and academic activities, followed by career growth and development. It was seen in another study that dermatology residents with matched mentors were more likely to publish high-quality articles.^[4]

Fifty-one percent of the participants in a survey conducted in the United States opted for a structured mentorship program.^[3] A survey identified that there is a need to

improve the awareness about mentoring as a whole in India—that it is not merely supervisory. There is a need for a greater number of adequately trained research mentors with better-structured programs.^[5] However, in the present survey, an informal or natural form of mentorship was in vogue.

A virtual mentorship program has the advantage of being accessible to multiple mentees and in remote

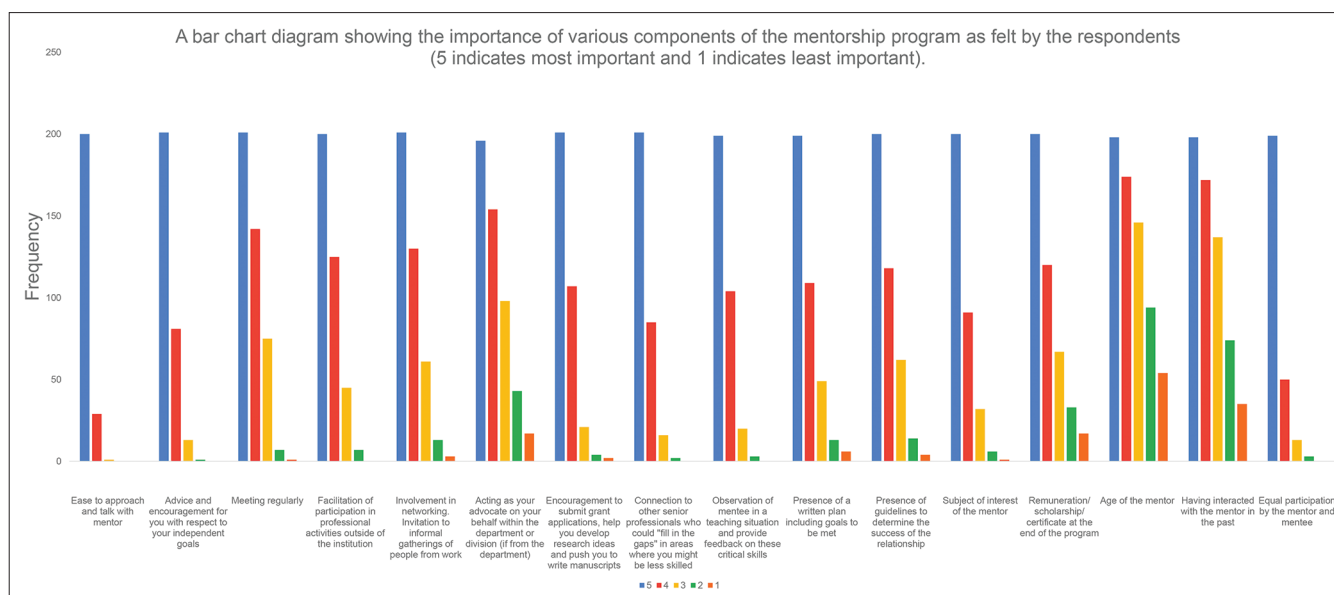


Figure 1: A bar chart diagram showing the importance of various components of the mentorship program as felt by the respondents (5 indicates most important and 1 indicates least important)

places.^[6] The waning of the pandemic might have resulted in the preference for hybrid mentorship programs by our respondents (45.0%).

In a survey conducted in the United States, it was seen that availability of the mentor; and more time spent outside the clinics and classroom was associated with a greater satisfaction with the mentorship program.^[7] In the current study, respondents felt that availability (92.6%) and communication (95.5%) were most important, for a successful mentorship program.

In a survey, it was observed that 70% of mentors had perceived professional development at the end of the mentorship process.^[8] Most (89.1%) respondents in our survey too felt that mentorship was a two-way street with both learning from the experience.

A survey distributed in the United Kingdom among trainees in surgery found that the modal duration of a mentorship program was 1–2 years.^[9] In our study, the median duration of an ideal mentorship was found to be 8 weeks.

In a study, it was seen that most (95%) mentees preferred weekly meetings with their mentors, and 18.8% of all participants desired more frequent meets.^[10] In the current study, however, most preferred monthly meetings with their mentors.

In a systematic review, which reviewed mentorship of youth in the United States, it was seen that the benefits of the program continued for a year beyond the end of the formal mentorship period.^[11] In our study, we found that retired respondents and professors were more likely to continue seeking advice, even beyond the confines of the program.

In a survey among 14 US medical schools, it was seen that the ratio of mentor to mentees ranged from 1:1 to 1:20.

However, both mentors and mentees preferred a lower ratio.^[12] In our study, a median ratio of two mentees to one mentor was deemed ideal.

An expert committee felt that mentoring should be introduced early in the postgraduate program, so as to help postgraduates bridge the gap. In addition, it would serve to provide an emotional support and behavioral stability to nascent minds.^[13] In our survey too we found that a majority of the participants preferred a mentorship program during the beginning of their postgraduation.

In an earlier survey, it was seen that older proteges were more likely to have shorter relationships and experience less career-related mentoring compared to younger ones.^[14] The age of the mentor was however not deemed to be important in this current study.

With the introduction of the GuruDerma program and the Leadership pipeline program as presidential projects of Dr. Rashmi Sarkar, the then President of the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL), virtual mentorship opportunities have now increased for young dermatologists in India who wish to learn and connect with subspecialty trained dermatologists. Virtual Mentorship programs are also offered by the International Society of Dermatology (ISD) and Skin Of Color Society (SOCS) to Indian dermatologists but these include stiff competition from international aspirants.^[15]

Limitation

The study has a low response rate of 8.2%, typical of most online surveys. However, such response in this kind of voluntary survey is unfortunately common in professional associations. An in-person survey would have yielded a better response.

Conclusion

The role of mentorship in academic and professional development is increasing, especially post the COVID-19 pandemic. It is going to play a pivotal role in the modelling and career development of the youth of today. In order to reap the maximum benefits, both the mentor and mentee must put their best feet forward, devote time, be available, and openly communicate. The results of our survey highlight that a mentorship program, introduced in the early years of postgraduation, after its completion or during early years of practice with once or twice monthly meets with a low mentee to mentor ratio with an informal style of mentoring for a duration of 6–8 weeks is likely to be ideal in the Indian dermatology set up. A successfully run mentorship program may forge bonds that extend beyond the program, hence further well-organized studies are required to explore the key elements of a successful mentoring relationship in order to ensure a positive and effective learning experience for both the mentor and the mentee.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Supplementary Table 1: Questionnaire that was Distributed to the Participants

- 1. What is your email id?**
- 2. What is your age in years**
- 3. What is your gender**
 - Male
 - Female
- 4. What is your current position**
 - Postgraduate student/Resident
 - Senior Resident/Postgraduate fellowship/Postgraduation training
 - Consultant (Private practice)
 - Assistant Professor or Equivalent
 - Associate Professor or Equivalent
 - Additional Professor or Equivalent
 - Professor
 - Retired
- 5. Have you been part of any prior mentorship program**
 - Yes
 - No
- 6. If yes, how many?**
- 7. If yes, which one**
- 8. If yes, did you benefit from such a program?**
 - Yes
 - No

We would like the following opinion from you on the general idea of mentorship
- 9. Is there need for mentorship programs in dermatology in India**
 - Yes
 - No
- 10. When would be the ideal time for a mentorship program?**
 - Under graduation
 - Postgraduation beginning
 - Final year of postgraduation
 - After postgraduation
 - Early dermatology practice
 - Middle-level dermatology practice
- 11. As a mentee would you seek guidance from the mentor after the duration of the program?**
 - yes
 - no
 - maybe
- 12. Would you prefer general mentorship program (encompassing multiple areas) or a specific one**
 - General
 - Specific
- 13. If specific what would the program of your choice be?**
 - Academic and Research related
 - For career growth and development
 - Leadership
 - Related to subspeciality
 - Practice management
 - Enhancing clinical competency and Personal growth
 - Work-life balance

14. Which according to you is the most important aspect for a successful mentor–mentee relationship?

- Communication
- Availability
- Setting clear goals
- Consistency
- All of the above

15. If you have a difference of opinion with your mentor, would you address it

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

16. Do you think need of mentoring is increased in the postpandemic era?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

17. In a dermatology mentorship program the mentor also learns from the mentee do you agree?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

18. We wish to know your opinion, on the importance of each of the following in a mentorship program.

- Improves career growth
 - Improves academic growth
 - Helps in networking
 - Builds a long-lasting bond
 - Build self-confidence/self-esteem
 - Gives you a role model

Section A

We wish to know your opinion, on the importance of each of the following in a mentorship program. (5 indicates most important and 1 indicates least important)

19. Ease to approach and talk with mentor

20. Advice and encouragement for you with respect to your independent goals

21. Meeting regularly

22. Facilitation of participation in professional activities outside of the institution

23. Involvement in networking. Invitation to informal gatherings of people from work

24. Acting as your advocate on your behalf within the department or division (if from the department)

25. Encouragement to submit grant applications, help you develop research ideas and push you to write manuscripts

26. Connection to other senior professionals who could “fill in the gaps” in areas where you might be less skilled

27. Observation of mentee in a teaching situation and provide feedback on these critical skills

28. Presence of a written plan including goals to be met

29. Presence of guidelines to determine the success of the relationship

30. Subject of interest of the mentor

31. Remuneration/scholarship/certificate at the end of the program

32. Age of the mentor

33. Having interacted with the mentor in the past

34. Equal participation by the mentor and mentee

Please let us know what you think is ideal in a mentorship situation

35. What modality of mentorship would you prefer?

- In person
- Virtual
- Hybrid
- Either

36. Frequency of meetings

- Once in two months
- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Everyday
- Others

37. If others please specify

38. What is the ideal duration of a mentorship program?

- 4 weeks
- 6 weeks
- 8 weeks
- Others

39. If others, please specify

40. Number of mentees at a time

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1
- does not matter
- others

41. Please specify number if others

42. Which style of mentorship

- Formal
- Informal/Natural
- Supervisory
- Group
- Telementoring
- Situational mentoring

43. Which of the following would you prefer

- National alone
- International alone
- International over national
- National over international

44. In case of international mentorship, from which of the following places would you like your mentor to be from

- USA
- Mexico
- Canada
- United Kingdom
- Germany
- Spain
- France
- Italy
- Russia

- China
- South East Asia
- Africa
- Japan
- Australia
- Others

45. If others, please specify

Supplementary Table 2: The responses obtained from the survey

Question	Number (%)
Age	35.48±11.1 (Median: 32, R: 24–76)
Gender ratio (male:female)	69:133
Current position (%)	
Consultant (Private practice)	65 (32.2)
Postgraduate student/Resident	60 (29.7)
Senior Resident/Postgraduate fellowship/Postgraduation training	32 (15.8)
Assistant Professor or Equivalent	17 (8.4)
Professor	13 (6.4)
Associate Professor or Equivalent	11 (5.4)
Additional Professor or Equivalent	2 (1)
Retired	2 (1)
Have you been part of any prior mentorship program?	
No	183 (90.6)
Yes	19 (9.4)
If yes, how many? (n=19)	
1	14 (73.6)
2	3 (15.8)
3	2 (10.5)
If yes, did you benefit from such a program?	
Yes	19 (100)
Is there need for mentorship programs in dermatology in India	
Yes	199 (98.5)
No	2 (1.0)
No comment	1 (0.5)
When would be the ideal time for a mentorship program?	
Postgraduation beginning	75 (37.1)
After postgraduation	48 (23.8)
Early dermatology practice	44 (21.8)
Final year of postgraduation	22 (10.9)
Under graduation	10 (5)
Middle-level dermatology practice	3 (1.5)
As a mentee would you seek guidance from the mentor after the duration of the program	
Yes	176 (87.1)
No	25 (12.4)
No comment	1 (0.5)
Would you prefer a general mentorship program (encompassing multiple areas) or a specific one	
Specific	109 (54.0)
General	92 (45.5)
Either	1 (0.5)
If specific what would the program of your choice be? (Multiple correct)	
Academic and Research related	111 (55)
For career growth and development	108 (53.5)
Enhancing clinical competency and personal growth	105 (53.0)
Practice management	96 (47.5)
Related to subspeciality	72 (35.6)
Work-life balance	64 (31.7)
Leadership	46 (22.8)
Which according to you is the most important aspect for a successful mentor–mentee relationship? (multiple correct)	
Communication	193 (95.5)
Availability	187 (92.6)

Contd...

Supplementary Table 2: Contd...

Question	Number (%)
Consistency	181 (89.6)
Setting clear goals	175 (86.6)
All of the above	173 (85.6)
If you have a difference of opinion with your mentor, would you address it	
Yes	133 (65.8)
Maybe	59 (29.2)
No	6 (3)
No comments	4 (2)
Do you think need of mentoring is increased in the post pandemic era?	
Yes	147 (72.8)
Maybe	36 (17.8)
No	18 (8.9)
No opinion	1 (0.5)
In a dermatology mentorship program, the mentor also learns from the mentee do you agree?	
Yes	180 (89.1)
Maybe	21 (10.4)
No	1 (0.5)
Which of the following is the most important way a mentorship program will be beneficial? (Multiple correct)	
Improves career growth	152 (74.3)
Improves academic growth	146 (72.3)
Build self-confidence/self-esteem	141 (69.8)
Builds a long-lasting bond	138 (68.3)
Gives you a role model	131 (64.9)
Helps in networking	123 (60.9)
What modality of mentorship would you prefer?	
Hybrid	91 (45.0)
In person	64 (31.7)
Either	31 (15.3)
Virtual	15 (7.4)
No opinion	1 (0.5)
Frequency of meetings	
Once a month	55 (27.2)
Twice a month	50 (24.8)
Once a week	42 (20.8)
Once in two months	25 (12.4)
Twice a week	12 (5.9)
Everyday	11 (5.4)
Others	7 (3.5)
What is the ideal duration of a mentorship program in weeks?	7.1±1.4 (Median 8, 4-8 weeks)
Number of mentees at a time(median, range, IQR)	2, 1-5, 2
Number of mentees does not matter	30 (14.8)
Which style of mentorship (more than one)	
Informal/Natural	141 (69.8)
Formal	66 (32.7)
Situational mentoring	58 (28.7)
Supervisory	44 (21.8)
Tele mentoring	36 (17.8)
Group	28 (13.9)
In case of international mentorship, from which of the following places would you like your mentor to be from	
United States of America	120 (59.4)
United Kingdom	92 (45.5)

Contd...

Supplementary Table 2: Contd...

Question	Number (%)
Australia	41 (20.3)
Germany	39 (19.3)
South East Asia	38 (18.8)
Canada	33 (16.3)
Japan	32 (15.8)
France	29 (14.4)
Italy	24 (11.9)
Spain	15 (7.4)
Mexico	8 (4.0)
Russia	11 (5.4)
Africa	5 (2.5)
China	4 (2.0)
Singapore	2 (1.0)
