

## MDHS Staff Mentoring Program September 2015

Mentoring has been proposed as a useful strategy to help advance careers and to maximise personal and professional development. We report on a successful staff mentoring program within the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS) at the University of Melbourne, Australia. The program commenced in 2011, and is currently in its fifth year of implementation. Development of the program commenced in early 2010; advice was sought from key experts in the field of mentoring, including Professor Sharon Bell, then based at LH Martin Institute, Professor Carol Nadelson, Harvard Medical School, and Professor Gail Robinson, University of Toronto. Following this, advice from Dr Jennifer de Vries was also sought which formed the foundation for the program.

The Faculty is large (2200 employees), with 70% academic and 30% professional staff. Of the academic staff, there are 900 (58%) women and 640 (42%) men. Despite being predominant in number, in terms of seniority, women are under-represented in senior faculty, with only 28% women professors. Of the professional staff, ~500 (78%) are women, with 140 (22%) men. For professional staff, there are more women in senior levels than men. The Faculty comprises a number of health related disciplines, is research-intensive, and is highly ranked nationally and internationally in terms of its performance. Following a strategic review a staff mentoring program was established to address gender inequity in particular, but also to enable staff potential more generally.

### Aim

The aim of the mentoring program is two fold: to create an organisational culture and environment where MDHS staff feel valued and nurtured, while at the same time, enabling individual staff to reach their full potential.

### Features

The features of the pilot staff mentoring program are that it be:

- Strategic (targeted to key categories of staff)
- Systematic (not a once-off approach)
- Sustainable (appropriately resourced)
- Suitable for the faculty's context (and include a mix of departments and disciplines)
- Available to both men and women
- Available to both academic and professional staff
- Subject to evaluation and review

### Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework adopted in the MDHS staff mentoring pilot program, the 'bifocal approach', was developed by Dr Jennifer de Vries.

Quoting from de Vries (2010: 6):

The bifocal approach, by playfully drawing on the notion of bifocal spectacles, opens up the possibility of focusing on both the close up vision, the shorter-term solution of developing individuals, and the distance vision, the need for longer-term transformational organisational change. As with bifocal spectacles, with practice there is increased ease and capacity to switch focal length, keeping both goals firmly in view... success with individual mentees is ultimately undermined if there is no accompanying longer-term vision. The bifocal approach emphasises that it is not a case

of one focus or the other, but that both individual development and organisational change are required.

## **Objectives**

### **For the mentee**

- Improved career strategies
- Extended networks (with both senior scholars and peers)
- Enhanced self-knowledge, confidence and professional identity
- Identification of areas for professional growth
- Greater understanding of promotions processes and how to negotiate these effectively
- Greater understanding of the mentoring process and improved capacity to mentor

### **For the mentor**

- The opportunity to extend contribution to the faculty through a new initiative
- The satisfaction of sharing knowledge and experience
- The opportunity to have a formal role in developing the next generation of academic and professional staff in the faculty
- A context for productive reflection on their own leadership and enduring contribution
- A learning opportunity through relationships with mentees whose experience may be very different to their own
- The opportunity to see a familiar world through a different lens
- Greater understanding of the mentoring process and improved capacity to mentor
- Enhanced self-esteem through recognition of continuing professional contribution

### **For the faculty**

- A new avenue for formal support and development of staff and potential leaders.
- Greater potential to attract and retain key staff through increased levels of satisfaction.
- Increased participation and productivity.
- Build a supportive environment in which staff feel included, valued and nurtured.
- Adopt a leadership role in staff development

## **Program structure**

In order to engage all staff in its organisational change focus, the program is open to men and women, and academic and professional staff. Each year, different classification levels are targeted, with mentees invited to apply. The program runs for ~ 11 months, and is structured around:

- One to one mentoring, with mentees matched to a senior mentor based on the mentee's identified objectives;
- Peer mentoring groups of 5-6 mentees working on shared objectives eg becoming more visible, and exploring leadership styles. Groups are provided with strategies, such as culture mapping, to develop greater systemic awareness and build a 'careers in context' view. Peer groups support each other to address career issues and become change agents in their workplace
- 4-5 structured professional development workshops for both mentors and mentees, covering topics such as: *The art of inquiry: building developmental relationships*; and *Mentor as agent for change*. Mentors are assisted to develop two-way developmental relationships with mentees, where both parties can understand the organisation from each other's perspectives. Mentors meet as a collegial group to identify systemic issues and are encouraged to work for change;
- Peer mentoring groups presenting to the Faculty senior leadership and mentors at the end of the program on what they have learned as individuals, and what the Faculty can learn from the experience. This is in keeping with the program's aims of benefiting both individuals and the broader organisation.

**Participants**

To date, 273 staff have participated either as a mentor or as a mentee in the program (Table 1). Of the 273 participants, 198 (73%) are women, and 75 (37%) are men. As indicated in Table 1, 115/145 (79%) of mentees are women. This has been consistent across all five years of the program’s implementation. For mentors, 83/128 (65%) are women. This is in keeping with overall mentees being more junior, and mentors more senior. Mentees self-select to participate, with more women than men choosing to participate.

**Table 1: Total number of mentees and mentors participants 2011-2015**

	Women	Men	Total
<b>TOTAL MENTEES</b>	115	30	145
<b>TOTAL MENTORS</b>	83	45	128
	198	75	273

Of the 145 mentees who have participated, 101 are academic staff, and 44 are professional staff (Table 2). Each year, different classification levels are targeted, and mentees in those levels are invited to apply. On average, there are 29 mentees participating each year. Mentors are strategically invited to participate; they are matched according to the objectives identified by mentees in each year’s cohort. As the program has developed, past mentees have been invited to be mentors, and each year there is a purposeful selection of new and past mentors, and past mentees who are invited to be mentors.

**Table 2: Total number of participants 2011-2015, according to gender, classification and cohort**

Mentees	Women	Men	Total	Academic	Professional		New mentors	Past mentors	Past mentee, now mentor
<b>Cohort 1 Pilot program 2011-2012</b>									
Professional staff HEW 8	7	0	7		7				
Academic staff B3-B6	12	4	16	16					
<b>Cohort 1 pilot MENTEES</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>23</b>						
<b>Cohort 1 pilot MENTORS</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>23</b>						
<b>Cohort 2 2012-2013</b>									
Professional staff HEW 7	13	1	14		14				
Academic staff Level C	24	8	32	32					

<b>Cohort 2 MENTEES</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>46</b>					
<b>Cohort 2 MENTORS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>46</b>				<b>34</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Cohort 3 2013-2014</b>								
Professional staff HEW 9/10	6	0	6		6			
Academic staff Level D/early E	4	7	11	11				
<b>Cohort 3 MENTEES</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>					
Peer mentoring only								
<b>Cohort 4 2014</b>								
Professional staff HEW 6	5	1	6		6			
Academic staff Level A6-A8	12	3	15	15				
<b>Cohort 4 MENTEES</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>21</b>					
<b>Cohort 4 MENTORS</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>21</b>				<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
								<b>8</b>
<b>Cohort 5 2015</b>								
Mid to early career Professional staff	9	2	11		11			
Mid to early career Academic staff	23	4	27	27				
<b>Cohort 5 MENTEES</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>38</b>					
<b>Cohort 5 MENTORS</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>38</b>				<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>
								<b>8</b>
<b>Total Academic mentees</b>				<b>101</b>				
<b>Total Professional staff mentees</b>					<b>44</b>			

## **Evaluation**

Both summative and formative evaluation is undertaken for each cohort. Summative evaluation occurs at the completion of each annual program, with both mentors and mentees asked to complete an individual anonymous online survey. Evaluation of the program has shown that mentees and mentors have benefited through learning new skills, building new professional networks, developing a deeper understanding of the faculty and university and their role within it, and personal development through new insights, attitudes and self confidence. The organisation has benefited through identification and understanding of systemic problems through the perspective of its staff, providing an opportunity to address problems which may otherwise go unrecognised. Peer mentoring, in particular, has proved to be highly valued by mentees, and is often sustained beyond the life of the annual program. Mentees found this element to be very valuable in terms of networking, understanding how the organisation works and developing peer support. In conclusion, the development and implementation of the MDHS mentoring program has led to personal and professional development of individual staff, while at the same time, benefiting the organisation.

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