

# An Evaluation of a Student-led Mentorship Programme in a New Zealand School of Nursing

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## **Abstract**

**Aim.** To report a qualitative study that evaluated the implementation of an inaugural student-

## **Background**

Numerous factors can influence nursing students entering tertiary study for the first time (Hendry et al., 2020). Nursing students in their first year of tertiary study often express apprehension and a lack confidence (Foxwell et al., 2017; Rohatinsky et al., 2017; Yomtov et al., 2017). Five, year three nursing students met formally with the Head of School of Nursing at the beginning of the 2019 academic year seeking support to implement a student-led mentorship programme at the Southern Institute of Technology School of Nursing. A student-led mentorship programme is where students support and foster better communication and community between each other with the intention to reduce stress and anxiety and improve their sense of belonging, A student-led mentorship programme also provides an opportunity for Mentorship Programme Leaders and Mentors to improve the intangible skills of communication and leadership (Bulut et al., 2010; Mault et al., 2019; Ssemata et al., 2017).

The proposed initiative of implementing a student-led mentorship programme followed informal conversations the year three nursing students had regarding their appreciation of support they had received from cohorts ahead of them when they began the nursing programme. Their encounters



Preparation (Health and Wellness), and with an endorsement from the Head of School, they became part of the student-led mentorship programme.

The two purposes of the student-led mentorship programme were; (1) to foster better communication and community between students to reduce stress and anxiety and to improve their sense of belonging; and (2) to provide

### ***Ethical Clearance***

Ethical clearance was received in 2019 by the Southern Institute of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee. An ethical application was submitted to the committee to ensure the safety of the researchers and participants in the research and that all aspects of data collection met the requirements of informed consent and privacy. Consent was implied if a participant completed one or both questions of the questionnaire. The researchers received the data from *Blackboard*, with all participant names removed. The only identifying feature was information concerning which role they had in the programme.

### ***Data Collection***

Data was collected by two questions developed by the researchers and loaded onto the electronic learning platform, *Blackboard*. The data was collected in the final two weeks of the academic year. An announcement was placed on *Blackboard* with an information sheet explaining the study and the date the questions would no longer be available. If students did not have access to an electronic device,



to want to be a part of it, but want to be a part of it number break down barriers between these, I felt we become a unified School of Nursing.” Another Mentorship Programme Leader stated, “Bringing all the programmes together was great, we shared and learnt from each other, perhaps in the future the postgraduate programme could also be part of this.” Collectively, the Mentorship Programme Leaders stories expressed that in the first month they were faced with many challenges that they had not foreseen during their planning, including the number of students who wanted to be Mentors and Mentees. An additional challenge expressed by the Mentorship Programme LeadersL





stories included feelings that the programme was a great initiative, well supported and provided opportunities to meet new people and engage across the programmes and cohorts within these.

### *Mentee stories*

For the Mentees, their stories expressed that they felt a sense of welcome and belonging. They conveyed that having a Mentor helped them to settle into a new tertiary environment, gain advice on how to manage their workload, build friendships and network with other nursing students. A common statement in the Mentees' stories was that being mentored had worked well as a social support system for them. Their stories expressed that throughout the year, the mentor support had helped combat burnout, bullying and stress. Their collective concerns regarding bullying and stress were stated in multiple (n=72) Mentees' stories as being of significant concern to them with publications across different media expressing bullying and stress as being common across nursing environments.

The shared activities were highlighted throughout the Mentees' stories. They voiced that these enabled a sense of comradery as a relaxed shared experience. One Mentee stated, "I loved sharing lunch with everyone, and during these I learnt heaps, it was just awesome." Another avowed: "Taking the time to share lunch with the whole school was tremendous, I met wonderful people and made firm friends across the School of Nursing. I actually believed I belonged with these people, actuaent 1 341.83W\*nBT/F4 12 Tf1 0 612 792 reW\*nBT/F1 12 Tf1 0 0 1 457.17 398.13 Tm0 g0 G[(onf

## **Discussion**

The stories from this study support the view that the inaugural implementation of a student-led mentorship programme was successful for the participants. The results of this study are consistent with previous evaluations of mentorship programmes. Bulut et al. (2010) highlighted in their evaluation of a mentorship programme that mentoring was a learning and developmental process that had increased student satisfaction. A scoping review conducted by Jacobs (2017) concluded that nursing student peer mentorship is about support, connections, and a process of socialised learning. Yomtov et al., (2017) quasi-experimental study measured the effectiveness of a university peer-mentoring program at a comprehensive university in Southern California, which aimed to increase retention and graduation rates at the university. This research (Yomtov et al., 2017) measured the effectiveness of the program through students' feelings of belonging, connectedness, perceived academic and social support, and familiarity with campus resources and facilities, concluding that mentored students significantly felt more integrated into the campus and more connected. These conclusions (Bulut et al., 2010; Jacobs, 2017; Yomtov et al., 2017) can also be deduced from this study's results despite the different research methodology used.

This study guided by a narrative enquiry research approach suggested that some Mentors had experienced feelings of not being needed when Mentees reduced/ceased contact. Another opinion expressed was not being aware that a Mentee had decided to withdraw from the programme. These points align with Ssemata et al., (2017) qualitative research, an interpretative method of naturalistic inquiry that found concerns about mentoring mostly occurred when participants' experiences with the mentoring programmes were not well aligned with the desired characteristics of successful mentoring relationships. We have concluded from this research the need for an improvement for future programmes by implementing a system to advise Mentors and Mentees if their Mentee or Mentor has withdrawn from the programme and increasing support between the Mentorship Programme Leaders and Mentors when contact is reduced. The underlying consideration of a future implementation for these issues will be the privacy of the Mentor and Mentee.

The effectiveness of this inaugural student-led mentorship programme in fostering better communication and community between students, supports the continuation of this in the 2020 academic year. Furthermore, the success expressed by the Mentorship Programme Leaders and



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