Self-perceived leadership development of peer tutors in interprofessional undergraduate healthcare studies

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Background

Peer tutors are used as teaching partners in undergraduate programmes at the University of Pretoria to transfer knowledge and practical skills to students from various healthcare disciplines. Peer tutors are placed in leadership positions and their role in the development, learning, and success of fellow students is widely documented. However, minimal research has been done on the development of their leadership abilities through involvement in tutor training programmes. The assumption of the study was that tutors’ leadership skills can be developed by introducing them to the transformational leadership model of Kouzes and Posner. “The five practices of exemplary leaders” include: 1. Model the way; 2. Inspire a shared vision; 3. Challenge the process; 4. Enable others to act; 5. Encourage the heart.

Purpose

The aim of this study was to describe the self-perceived leadership development of peer tutors in undergraduate healthcare studies during participation in a tutor training programme.

Methods

A triangulation mixed method design was used to collect complementary quantitative and qualitative data with equal contribution. The study sample (total sampling) consisted of 12 tutors appointed for the academic year. The tutors attended orientation on the content of their respective modules, a tutoring and a leadership workshop. Data collection was done by means of structured self-report instruments completed in the beginning and end of the programme, a narrative description of their experiences halfway through the academic year and an unstructured focus group at the end of their tutoring responsibilities.

Conclusions

An increased focus on leadership development in addition to the focus on their knowledge and skills, lead to better tutoring abilities and skills outcomes of the tutees, as well as improved academic programme output. It contributes to interprofessional education and eventually improved outcomes for patients and communities.

Results

The study is still in progress but preliminary results show that all the tutors taking part in the tutor training programme exhibit much of the characteristics as described by Kouzes and Posner’s five practices of exemplary leaders. All the tutors wanted to tutor in order to help peer students by setting examples for them and by inspiring a shared vision. Becoming a tutor was challenging for some as they had to tutor their peers or students from other disciplines, so they had to take a risk and develop their own leadership abilities in order to do so. Some tutors found it hard to enable others to act, as it is often easier to do things yourself rather to get others to act. The tutors also verbalized that they got better results when they made a point of recognizing others and celebrate small victories.

Implications

This study is expected to serve as the basis for a follow-up study to determine the impact of leadership development of peer tutors on the clinical knowledge and skills retention in peer undergraduate healthcare students, and the effect on interprofessional collaboration and health outcomes of patients.

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References


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Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Health Care Sciences Research Ethical Committee from the University of Pretoria.