

Chapter 13

Models of Academic Support and Advising

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines learning support models in undergraduate medical education. LCME requires robust system of student support for certification. Learning specialists with degrees in education are frequently in charge of leading student support systems. This may include tutoring programs, United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE), and other standardized exam preparation. Visibility and accessibility are key to the success of any support program. LCME also mandates both academic and career advising. Advising, mentoring, and coaching are often thought of as interchangeable terms. However, they each have unique implications and their applicability to medical education is explored. Learning communities are frequently used to enhance the delivery of the advising system. Specific examples are given.

INTRODUCTION

Academic support for medical students is a broad concept, as the medical student faces intense academic challenges including enormous amounts of information, rigorous testing, strong societal and peer normative pressure, and frequently lack of social support. This chapter will specifically address the following objectives:

1. Describe the role of the learning specialist in Undergraduate Medical Education (UME).
2. Discuss how to create and evaluate a peer-tutoring system.
3. Describe ways to support student preparation for standardized exams, including USMLE.

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4. Identify the differences between advising, mentoring and coaching, and when each might be useful for supporting the medical student.

BACKGROUND

The Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) accredits medical schools in the United States, and has standards around student support services. The most pertinent to academic support is:

11.1 Academic Advising

A medical school has an effective system of academic advising in place for medical students that integrates the efforts of faculty members, course and clerkship directors, and student affairs staff with its counseling and tutorial services and ensures that medical students can obtain academic counseling from individuals who have no role in making assessment or promotion decisions about them. (LCME, 2019)

While this leaves substantial room for interpretation, the intent is clear. Students must have academic support from the school that is multi-pronged in approach, easily accessible, and safe to use. The complexity of creating an environment of academic support has led many schools to hire learning specialists to help guide these efforts. The learning specialist can help design and administer programs designed to build academic support including peer tutoring, remediation of academic deficiencies, and test-taking skills. Academic advising for the individual student can be achieved by designing programs using different models of advising, mentoring or coaching, depending on the intent and resources.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Learning Specialists

Student learning support specialists typically have master degrees or higher, and work with students on learning strategies, time management, test taking strategies, and academic resilience. There is a dearth of evidence-based information about learning specialists in the medical education literature. A search of PubMed in October 2019 for the phrase “learning specialist” garnered a single, non-relevant match. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the programs that a learning specialist would support. The programs are generally focused in one of three ways: 1) reactive-deficit, in which students who are identified as struggling in some way are helped to develop their skills, 2) proactive-deficit, in which students who are identified at risk of struggling are helped to develop their skills, and 3) proactive-developmental, in which all students are given skills to help improve performance. (Kebaetse MB, 2018) Ideally, the learning specialist will involve him or herself in the use of all three of these approaches.

When working with specific struggling students (i.e. taking the reactive-deficit approach), the learning specialist is providing a “learning consult.” An example of an intake form may be found in Appendix 1. Particular attention should be made to the possibility of learning disabilities, which may require a referral to the Office of Student Access for confidential evaluation or accommodations as protected under the Americans with Disability Act (ADAAA). Learning support specialists will also need to advocate

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