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RESEARCH

Mentoring young researchers: can the Donald J Cohen Fellowships model be applicable and useful to Australasian psychiatry?

Robert Adler, Andres Martin, Chohye Park, Joseph Rey and Susan Tan

Objectives: To describe the experience with the Donald J Cohen Fellowship program of the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions (IACAPAP) and examine whether this model may be applied by the RANZCP to attract and support young researchers in Australasia.

Methods: The program at the September 2006 IACAPAP conference included 50 young researchers, 16 mentors and 8 'host fellows', and consisted of exclusive poster sessions, daily small-group mentoring meetings, oral presentation of selected papers, and a summary and feedback session.

Results: Informal feedback from mentors, mentees and conference organisers was very positive.

Conclusions: A proposal about funding, participants and activities is presented. This suggests that a mentoring model similar to the Donald J Cohen Fellowship program can be easily conducted in Australasia. Implementing a program of this type would give College Fellows, the Australian Medical Council, the Commonwealth Government and other relevant organizations a clear message that the RANZCP is seriously committed to fostering and supporting research.

Key words: mentoring, psychiatry, research, training.

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College committees and senior academics often voice concerns about the amount of research by Fellows and trainees and recruitment into the profession.¹⁻³ A variety of initiatives have been implemented over the years to improve this situation but with limited success. This paper describes the Donald J Cohen Fellowship (DJCF) program of the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions (IACAPAP), examines how the model may be applied to support young researchers within the RANZCP, and makes specific proposals about funding and how the program may be transferred to the Australian and New Zealand circumstances. Since the College is currently in the process of reviewing its role in education and the structures to support this, it is an ideal opportunity to consider this issue.

THE RELEVANCE OF MENTORSHIP

While difficult to define,⁴ academics and senior professionals consider mentorship^{4,5} to be important in encouraging and supporting young

researchers and trainees. Empirical evidence of the effectiveness of mentoring is limited.⁶ Yet, it is widely believed that mentorship enhances career success and facilitates career selection, advancement and productivity.⁶ For example, Illes et al.⁷ evaluated a voluntary mentoring program for radiology junior faculty at the Stanford University School of Medicine consisting of formal mentoring meetings every 6 months. They reported improvements among program participants of 52% in research, 26% in teaching, and 6% in patient care. Mentorship has also been reported to influence selection of specialty, entering academic medicine and research productivity, while lack of mentorship has been identified as a specific barrier to completing research projects, theses and publications.⁶ Because of medical workforce shortages in most developed countries and rapid changes in medical education, the role of mentoring in preparing clinicians for the professional and ethical demands of a rapidly growing knowledge base, technological change and societal expectations is also receiving increasing attention.^{4,8}

IACAPAP'S DONALD J COHEN FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The DJCF program was established for the 2004 IACAPAP congress in Berlin⁹ in memory of Donald J. Cohen, former director of the Yale Child Study Centre and president of IACAPAP, who was a passionate supporter of young researchers and leaders in the field of child and adolescent mental health. The program was extended to the September 2006 congress in Melbourne, and is expected to continue at the congress in Istanbul in 2008. Similar programs are planned for the annual meeting of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the European Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP). While a formal evaluation is underway, the extension of this model reflects the widely held view of its usefulness.

THE MELBOURNE DJCF PROGRAM

About 150 young researchers world-wide applied for a DJCF in May 2006. The fellowship included shared hotel accommodation, registration and, in some cases, air fares to Melbourne. Application consisted of description of a research project and personal information. Fifty applicants were awarded a fellowship (from countries including Australia, Iran, Korea, Malaysia, Nigeria, People's Republic of China, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uganda, USA and Yemen, to name just a few). Participation in the DJCF program entailed attendance to specific activities throughout the conference, comprising: (a) a general introductory meeting, (b) an exclusive poster session (each fellow presented a poster of their work), (c) daily small-group mentoring sessions, (d) an oral presentation of selected papers, and (e) a final summary and feedback session. The small

mentoring groups consisted of six fellows, one or two senior overseas mentors (e.g. Helmut Remschmidt from Germany, Luis Rhode from Brazil), one senior mentor from Australia or New Zealand (e.g., Bruce Tonge from Melbourne, Sally Merry from Auckland) and a "host fellow" (Australian or New Zealand advanced trainee or young professional). Posters were rated by three senior researchers and the best three given a non-monetary, printed award. Projects varied widely in content, from 'Adrenergic α 2A receptor gene is associated with methylphenidate improvement of inattentive symptoms in children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder' (Guilherme Polanczyk, Brazil) to 'Psychological trauma, coping and long-term outcomes of the children of political prisoners' (Ninik Supartini, Indonesia). All fellows were also given a certificate.

In order to present a more textured picture of the experience, and before addressing the relevance and 'exportability' of such a program to the Australasian ecology, we next provide feedback from some of the Melbourne participants. Comments of participants in previous programs can be found in reference 9.

A MENTOR'S EXPERIENCE

"When I was invited to be a mentor for the DJCF program, I had no idea what to expect and simply accepted as I was happy to be actively involved in the conference. Little did I know it would turn out to be one of the most stimulating aspects of the entire IACAPAP congress.

I found myself co-mentoring with Jim Leckman from the Yale Child Study Center. Jim is a daunting figure, a trained analyst with an extensive research record, particularly in the area of Tourette's Disorder. The group comprised young psychiatrists and psychologists from Indonesia, France, Sweden, Hungary, China and Brazil, as well as Jim, Maria Conceição Rosario Campos from Brazil and me. We met each day of the conference to discuss and critique the fellows' posters and research as well as to get to know something of their work in their home countries. We finished with a meal together at a small Italian restaurant.

I learnt a great deal from the experience. Firstly, it is humbling to hear young colleagues from many countries, with fewer resources than those we take for granted and often complain about, talk with enthusiasm about their work and show a commitment to research that is all too often missing from Australian and New Zealand trainees in my experience. Secondly, I am full of admiration for young people for whom English is not their first language, conducting professional discussions in English. It is a powerful reminder how linguistically lazy we Anglophones often are. Thirdly, I learnt a great deal about mentoring from my co-mentor who also unwittingly taught me how to utilise poster sessions more constructively than I have

ever done in the past. In many ways, the final large group session was the best of all, with a representative from each of the eight groups summarising their experience with wit and technological skills that were truly amazing.

Was there a down side? Sure, the fellowship program was quite demanding of one's time and, when combined with chairing duties at the conference, left one with little time to choose between the many concurrent sessions. It certainly made the usual choice dilemmas much easier.

However, the most important aspect of the experience for me was the powerful reminder that, despite the mad world we live in, people from different countries and cultures can meet in a spirit of co-operation and friendship regardless of race, religion or colour. Stephanie Dowrick wrote in the *Good Weekend*, September 16, 2006: 'Giving up the ancient collective delusion that violence is a solution that will bring peace, rather than a lull in the fighting, may seem like an impossible dream. Yet it may also be the essential prelude if more creative and humane initiatives are ever to get a hearing.' The DJCF experience gave me a feeling of optimism, if only decent people are given a chance to show what they do, they do not need to cling onto the collective delusion."

FELLOWS' EXPERIENCES

"I was awarded a fellowship to attend the congress based on research done in my country. This financial aid, trivial to those from rich countries but precious to the 'have nots', enabled a lot of us to traverse many time zones to attend a feast for the mind. At the airport I chanced upon another fellow from Germany; our poster tubes locked horns and I already got the feeling that this was to be a congress with a difference. The most precious experience was the unexpected internal journey I was to embark on. I left my country with some trepidation, wondering whether the research I was to present was good enough for the conference, especially as it was still in the planning stage. It consoled me that there were wise mentors who could advise and help me improve the project. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the formidable big names that we read of in books and journals were real people who were friendly, down to earth and keen to share and promote growth, both professional and personal. It was reassuring to hear of colleagues who took comfort in the fact that if I, coming from a developing country, could take steps towards good research by networking with other investigators from the global village who had a similar passion, then anyone could do it. I had not noticed it till now but I had grown up a little, from a seed to a shoot, and perhaps I too could help other seeds grow."

"The most important part of the program, apart from the presentations of work and research, was an opportunity to meet child psychiatrists from around the globe on a daily basis and have group sessions. The mentors I worked with were generous with time and wisdom. Through this nurturing, we were able to change our ideas into tangible research projects. For example, fellows who were interested in biological and genetic studies explained how, in their own time and with almost no resources, they had set up an international young researchers' forum for biological child psychiatry. Others, pioneers of child psychiatry in their own countries with scarce resources, were offered practical help and support by mentors and other fellows. At the end of the program, most of the fellows, host fellows and mentors agreed to keep in touch and nurture the relationship developed during the program. During one mentoring session, I noticed the diversity of my group: Sri Lankan, Korean, American, German, Yemeni, Nigerian and Australian. I can not think of any occasion I have sat with such a variety of people to share our ideas about child psychiatry."

"It has been a great experience. I feel really inspired and motivated. Most of all, participation made me feel so involved and engaged, both professionally and personally, that I was very sad to part with the other fellows. For me, research was a very detached concept for a long time as I do not have to do it and it seemed irrelevant to my everyday practice. Once back from the conference, I unearthed my previous research proposals and decided to give them a go."

CAN THE DJCF MODEL BE TRANSFERRED TO THE AUSTRALASIAN CONTEXT?

As a basis for discussion, we put forward a version of the DJCF model, which can in our opinion be used in Australasia. This includes description of participants, composition of groups, schedule of activities and funding. For want of a better name, we will refer to it as the Congress Mentoring Fellowship (CMF) program. Given that a critical mass is required for optimal results, particularly to achieve interaction between young researchers from a variety of backgrounds and locations, the most appropriate setting would be the yearly College Congress.

ELIGIBILITY

Because this program seeks to encourage not only young psychiatrists to do research but also to promote recruitment into psychiatry of medical students with a research interest in psychological medicine, it is suggested that medical students in the final year of their degree, trainee psychiatrists, trainee paediatricians (who might later enrol in the Dual Fellowships Training Program), and College Fellows be allowed to

apply. While age limits should not pertain to trainees, College Fellows should perhaps be younger than 35 or 40 years. To encourage professional links with the Asian region and to support research in those countries,¹⁰ it is also suggested that a number of fellowships be awarded to trainees and young researchers from countries in the region. The possibility of having a few fellowships for allied health professions should also be considered: achieving the widest range of scientific and cultural exchanges is the goal.

Participants would apply by submitting the abstract of a research project and a brief curriculum describing their professional experience and aspirations to a small team specifically set up for that purpose (e.g., consisting of three Fellows within, or reporting to, the College's Research Committee). Applications would be rated by the team and those with the highest marks awarded a fellowship. Marking would take into account not only scientific quality but the location of the applicant's work, isolation and other factors, which would be operationalised beforehand. For example, a small number of fellowships could be reserved for Asian or allied health applicants. Participants are given a certificate, are expected to present a poster of their research and attend all the activities of the special program.

MENTORING GROUPS

There should be several small mentoring groups consisting of five or six CMFs and two or three mentors recruited beforehand. The number of small mentoring groups would depend on the fellowships awarded.

PROGRAM

The College conference usually lasts 5 days. Hence, the CMF program, which would avoid clashes with opening and closing ceremonies and keynote presentations, could include:

- Day 1:
 - Welcome and introduction to the program.
 - Allocation to small mentoring groups.
 - A two or three-hour workshop on research methods, publishing or similar topics, which may change from year to year.
- Day 2:
 - Dedicated poster session (one hour in private to allow the CMFs to view each other's posters before opening to delegates). Three nominated senior researchers read and mark posters and the best three are given a non-monetary award.
 - First round of small-group mentoring meetings (about 90 minutes each).

- Day 3:
 - Second round of small-group mentoring meetings (about 90 minutes each).
- Day 4:
 - Third round of small-group mentoring meetings (about 90 minutes each).
- Day 5:
 - A two-hour summary, evaluation and feedback session in the morning.
 - One of the CMFs to speak briefly at the closing ceremony.

FUNDING

It can be assumed that each fellowship may cost \$2000 on average (in the immediate future). This would comprise a reduced registration to the Congress, basic shared hotel accommodation, and air fares when appropriate. Fellows whose employers fund their attendance to conferences would receive limited or no funding.

Funds for the fellowships would be provided from: (a) profits from the previous College Congress; (b) the College central office, branches, faculties and sections; (c) pharmaceutical companies; (d) neuroscience research groups or institutions seeking to encourage psychiatric research; and (e) individual donations or bequests. These funds would be pooled each year and the number of fellowships that could be funded determined and advertised. It would be reasonable to expect, and not financially burdensome, that each branch fund at least one fellowship (\$2000), and the larger branches two (\$4000) (e.g., Victoria – 2; ACT – 1; NSW – 2; Queensland – 2; NT – 1, WA – 1; SA – 1; Tasmania – 1; New Zealand – 2) which would total 13. Of the faculties and sections: Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry – 2; Old Age Psychiatry – 2; Psychotherapies – 2; Consultation Liaison – 1; Forensic – 1; Addictions – 1. Centrally, the College could fund at least 5 fellowships for the Asia-Pacific region. This would result in more than 26 fellowships, which could easily grow to 30 or 35 if funds from the profits of the previous congresses are added. Mentors and other people involved would serve in an honorary capacity.

EVALUATION

Evaluation would optimally be coordinated with similar program evaluations currently in progress; this would be an integral part of the program and the responsibility of the implementation team. If successful, these fellowships might become sought after and even receive credits for training or continuing education.

IMPLEMENTATION

Much work needs to be done on the specifics of the program, funding, and other matters. Also, to attract as many applicants as possible, the fellowships need to be publicised timely and widely. Such a program could probably be conducted during the 2008 College Congress. The WPA International Congress (28 November – 2 December 2007) in Melbourne would provide an invaluable opportunity to showcase such a program but to do so it would require quick decisions and commitment.

CONCLUSIONS

As illustrated by the above proposal, it is clear that a mentoring model to support and stimulate young researchers similar to the Donald J Cohen Fellowship program can be implemented easily in the Australasian context. Further, such an initiative would fit well with the College's educational and research policies and the emphasis in providing access to mentoring to trainees, particularly those from small training programs, overseas trainees, or from isolated or remote areas. The current review of the College's educational role and structures provides an excellent opportunity to consider this initiative. Such a program might be proof that collegial organizations (i.e., branches, faculties) are prepared to "put their money where their mouth is", would give College Fellows, the Australian Medical Council, the Commonwealth Government and other relevant organizations a clear message in this regard and may help to strengthen links with mental health

professionals in neighbouring countries. It is also possible that neuroscience research groups and some universities might be interested in joining such an initiative.

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