

APPLIED RESEARCH

Formal Peer-Teaching in Medical School Improves Academic Performance: The MUSC Supplemental Instructor Program

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Background: Formal systems of peer teaching are common in many advanced-degree graduate school programs but are less prevalent in medical schools. In 1997, The Medical University of South Carolina's Center for Academic Excellence created a Supplemental Instructor (SI) program in which interested upper-level medical students are hired to teach a small group of junior peers, primarily in basic science topics.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine if participation as an SI leader resulted in measurable academic improvement for those students. This study examined if participation as a teacher in the SI program (SI leader) resulted in measurable academic improvement for those students.

Methods: Admission characteristics (grade point average [GPA], Medical College Aptitude Test score, age, year of enrollment, and gender) of all SI leaders were compiled from the academic years 1996-2001. A second cohort of students, who shared the first group's admission characteristics but who chose not to teach as SIs, was identified as a comparison control group. Outcome measures included United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1 and 2 scores and final medical school GPA. Paired student two-tailed t-test statistics compared group means on all outcome variables.

Results: There were 199 SI leaders with non-SI students matched controls studied. There were no significant differences upon admission between the two groups; however, the SI leader group had significantly higher USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 scores and final medical school GPA compared to the non-SI group.

Conclusions: The activity of formal peer-teaching was beneficial to the SI leaders' own academic success as measured by GPA and USMLE test scores.

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Formal systems of peer teaching, such as Teaching Assistants, section leaders, and tutors, commonly exist in many advanced-degree graduate school programs. However, this model of peer teaching is considerably less prevalent in medical schools where the students'

"free time" to engage in such activities is perceived to be limited.

In 1997, The Medical University of South Carolina's (MUSC's) Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) program created a formal peer-teaching

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