



Evaluation of the Nutrition Society of Australia Mentoring Program for Registered Nutritionists

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Mentoring is an established method of promoting networking, professional growth and learning, and career development in many health professions⁽¹⁾. For a non-vocational profession such as nutrition with a diverse scope of practice, the impact of mentoring remains unclear. In 2020, the Nutrition Society of Australia (NSA) developed and implemented a mentoring program for registered nutritionists. The individually matched mentoring facilitates a 12-month relationship between nutritionists who opted-in to the program. This qualitative case study research aimed to understand the conceptualisation and development of the NSA mentoring program and explore the experience from the viewpoints of both mentors and mentees in the program. First, a 60-minute focus group was conducted with the NSA program organising committee to explore the initial conceptualisation, objectives of the program, expected outcomes, and related training provided to mentors and mentees. Then, a 34-item questionnaire was sent to 63 participants from the first three program cohorts to collect their demographic information as well as expectations, perception and experience of the mentoring. Twenty-one questionnaire responses from 10 mentors and 11 mentees were collected. Participants were from a range of nutrition professions across NSW, VIC, QLD, and WA. Ten questionnaire participants (four mentors and six mentees) further participated in in-depth interviews to provide narratives of their experience. Thematic analysis was conducted with employment of theory-building structure within the case study⁽²⁾. Our findings indicated that despite an explicit discussion of mentoring focus on employability skills, e.g. communication, professionalism, advocacy, etc., many mentees perceived mentoring as a gateway to employment and career pathway development. The perceived benefits of mentoring were highly dependent on matching of mentor/mentee, which was complicated by the diversity of practice within the profession, and unstated expectations of individual mentees. Regardless of the perceived quality of their mentoring experience, participants reported that the NSA mentoring program added value to the society's membership and were supportive of program continuity. In conclusion, the NSA mentoring program was a value-adding strategy to the society membership and it could play an important role in career pathway support into the diverse areas of practice in the nutrition profession. More explicit discussion of expectations between mentors and mentees at the beginning of mentoring could enhance the mentoring experience.

Keywords: mentoring; continuous professional development; qualitative; case study research

Ethics Declaration

Yes

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References

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