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The Brightside Trust: a dynamic E-mentoring tool

A mentoring tool to support and enhance face-to-face mentoring

The Brightside Trust is a new and innovative charity whose mission is to help individuals overcome disadvantage and realise their potential. Our first project is designed to help students who are traditionally under-represented in medicine and allied health professions gain access to degree courses in these subjects.

The Brightside Trust has developed a dynamic online mentoring tool to support and enhance face-to-face mentoring relationships. We recognise that mentoring is an important means for offering personal contact and encouragement to students aiming to take a career path such as medicine, who often lack the support of their peers and/or family. However, there are a number of issues and obstacles currently faced by higher education widening participation programmes using mentoring schemes. These include time-pressured mentors and geographical distance between mentors and mentees. Our e-mentoring software has been developed specifically to address these issues.

Bright Journals

Our e-mentoring website, Bright Journals, provides the mentor and mentee access to their own private area where they can communicate via journal style postings known as weblogs. Weblogs are an ideal format for e-mentoring software as the journal entries are interactive allowing mentoring partners to enter into direct dialogue with their mentor/mentee. In addition, Bright Journals has a number of features designed to facilitate the mentoring relationship, including:

- Online mentor training
 - An impressive resources library providing credible information about medicine and healthcare careers, university life, exam revision and links to useful journals and other useful sources of information
 - SMS text alerts to inform mentors and mentees when their mentoring partner has added to their journal
 - Forums for mentors and university coordinators to discuss best practice
 - Timed prompts to facilitate and target conversations, i.e. in November the mentors will be automatically prompted to ask their mentee about UCAS form submission
 - News broadcasts about topical health subjects and institution-specific events
 - A sophisticated monitoring system to allow coordinators to check the level and quality of communication between mentoring partners
- Bright Journals is currently being used by 9 higher education institutes and about to be launched in additional 7 institutes.

Evaluation

Interim evaluation of the software by those already involved revealed that 75% of survey participants felt that the experience was beneficial, 78% thought that the website was easy to use and 72% felt that e-mentoring is an excellent way to get to know their mentoring partner. In addition, over 54% of the mentees surveyed felt that the e-mentoring scheme had reinforced their desire to attend medical school. The two most popular choices for extra support include opportunities to speak face-to-face with mentor and topic suggestions. The

following quotes are from mentors and mentees currently using Bright Journals through a scheme run by Guy's, King's and St Thomas' Medical School in London.

“ I have found Bright Journals really useful in keeping up to date with the latest scientific and medical news.” Mentor.

“ The whole experience of building up a friendship over the internet seemed very fun, besides I thought it would be great experience to put on my UCAS form. It has made me think about my future degree in medicine, and I have been given helpful tips about the choice of university and the course.” Mentee.

“ I strongly believe that it can have beneficial effects on my mentee's aspirations since this scheme enables mentees to fully understand what medicine involves and thus allow them to make an informed choice about their careers.” Mentor.

Potential

From the feedback so far, we are in no doubt that e-mentoring has the potential to foster increased contact opportunities between mentors and mentees in non-intrusive ways. It also offers a sense of community to individuals who feel isolated by their goals and aspirations from their immediate peers.

“ It's a great communication tool, and I'm very happy to use it.” Mentee.

If you would like to see a demonstration of the website please visit www.brightjournals.org and click on demo.