

YOU SHOULD TRY THIS!

Using speed networking to connect medical students with research supervisors

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Implication Statement

Many medical students at the University of Ottawa report difficulty in finding a research supervisor. “Meet the Researcher” is a one-hour one-on-one speed networking event that has been run regularly by the University of Ottawa’s Pediatrics Special Interest Group (PedSIG) and the Department of Pediatrics of the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) since 2017. The initiative facilitates efficient introductions between medical students and researchers to support the establishment of well-matched research partnerships. This event format is preferred by medical students and researchers for initiating research partnerships, and is adaptable to both in-person or virtual settings.

Utiliser le réseautage éclair pour mettre en relation les étudiants en médecine avec des superviseurs de recherche

Énoncé des implications de la recherche

De nombreux étudiants en médecine de l’Université d’Ottawa rapportent avoir de la difficulté à trouver un superviseur de recherche. « Rencontrez le chercheur » est un événement de réseautage éclair d’une heure en rencontres individuelles, organisé régulièrement depuis 2017 par le « Pediatric Special Interest Group » (PedSIG) de l’Université d’Ottawa et le service de pédiatrie du centre hospitalier pour enfants de l’est de l’Ontario (CHEO). Cette initiative facilite des rencontres efficaces entre étudiants en médecine et chercheurs afin de soutenir la création de partenariats de recherche bien adaptés. Ce format d’événement est privilégié par les étudiants en médecine et les chercheurs pour amorcer des collaborations en recherche et peut être adapté aux contextes en personne ou virtuels.

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Introduction

Research experience in medical school allows medical students to gain invaluable skills and mentorship while advancing their future careers.¹⁻³ However, finding a suitable research supervisor can be time-consuming. Studies suggest that speed networking between medical students/residents and faculty members can lead to higher mentorship quality and improved research engagement/productivity, although data remains sparse.⁴⁻⁶ University of Ottawa's PedSIG and CHEO Department of Pediatrics (DoP) created "Meet the Researcher" (MTR), a speed networking event designed to support the establishment of research partnerships between medical students and research supervisors.

Description of the innovation

MTR is a one-hour event where medical students and researchers meet one-on-one via speed networking. The event is hosted by PedSIG and supported by the DoP Undergraduate Medical Education administration. Two months prior to the event, approximately five pediatric researchers are recruited and asked to provide details about their research projects. Due to high demand, approximately 10-15 medical students are selected by lottery to participate. Students from all years are invited, however mainly pre-clerkship students take part. The ratio of researchers to students is approximately 1:3. Students review and rank the research project descriptions based on preference. PedSIG student leaders create individualized itineraries based on student preferences, so each student has 3-5 one-on-one meetings with researchers for 4-10 minutes each (time intervals varied annually based on feedback received). At the one-hour event, each researcher is assigned a room while students follow their itinerary, allowing them to meet and discuss the projects. In 2021-2022, MTR was successfully hosted virtually via Microsoft Teams breakout rooms. Researchers review the students' CVs before and during the event to gain baseline context and facilitate productive discussions during their face-to-face meeting. After the event, researchers notify the students they met to finalize plans regarding research project involvement. Students not selected are then free to seek other opportunities. All participants are sent an online survey (Supplemental Data

1 and 2) six weeks post-event to obtain feedback and event outcomes.

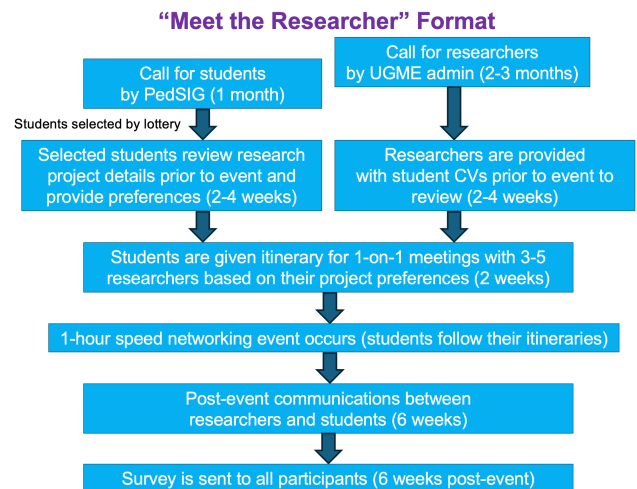


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the timeline of salient steps in the planning of "Meet the Researcher". Admin: Administrative assistant, CV: Curriculum vitae, PedSIG: Pediatrics Special Interest Group, UGME: Undergraduate Medical Education

Evaluation

From 2017-2022, we hosted nine MTR events. We administered surveys six weeks post-event to collect participants' demographics, event satisfaction and research partnership outcomes (Appendix A). Frequency distributions were produced for categorical variables. For analysis of "Event Satisfaction" variables, "Strongly Agree" and "Agree", and "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" were combined respectively; "Neutral" was analyzed separately. Response rate for all events was 67% (28/42) for researchers and 66% (71/107) for students. Both students (80%, 57/71) and researchers (89%, 25/28) were satisfied with MTR. 66% (47/71) of students and 70% (19/27) of researchers preferred MTR over other methods to find research partnerships. Based on feedback, the time allotted for each one-on-one meeting increased yearly (e.g. four minutes in 2018, 10 minutes in 2022). Generally, students preferred and were more satisfied between 2021-2022 when MTR offered a longer meeting duration (9-10 minutes each) and virtual format. Overall, 56% (15/27) of supervisors found a student through MTR, while 18% (5/27) of supervisors were still finalizing arrangements. Lower student match rates (32%, 23/71) likely reflect the disproportion between students and available projects.

Next steps

MTR is an efficacious and preferred method for establishing medical student-researcher partnerships. With student/administrative support, access to physical space and/or virtual meeting platforms, MTR is easy to implement in-person or virtually and transferable to other departments/institutions. Study limitations include the survey nonresponse rate of over 30%. Further analyses should evaluate longer-term outcomes, including scholarly output and student professional identity formation.

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Appendix A “Meet the Researcher” post-event survey results from participating medical students (71/107, 66%) and researchers (28/42, 67%) between 2017–2022

Event Satisfaction Questions										
Year		2017-2018			2019-2020			2021-2022		
Event format		In-person			In-person			Virtual		
Meeting duration with each researcher		3-4 mins each			6 mins each			9-10 mins each		
		Strongly Agree-Agree	Neutral	Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree-Agree	Neutral	Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree-Agree	Neutral	Disagree-Strongly Disagree
Event allotted enough time for discussion and interaction	Researchers (n = 28)	5/7 (71%)	0/7 (0%)	2/7 (29%)	7/11 (64%)	0/11 (0%)	4/11 (36%)	8/10 (80%)	0/10 (0%)	2/10 (20%)
	Students (n = 71)	11/23 (48%)	3/23 (13%)	9/23 (39%)	11/25 (44%)	4/25 (16%)	10/25 (40%)	13/23 (57%)	4/23 (17%)	6/23 (26%)
Event was attended by an acceptable researcher to student ratio	Researchers (n = 28)	5/7 (71%)	2/7 (29%)	0/7 (0%)	7/11 (64%)	3/11 (27%)	1/11 (9%)	8/10 (80%)	2/10 (20%)	0/10 (0%)
	Students (n = 71)	18/23 (78%)	2/23 (9%)	3/23 (13%)	19/25 (76%)	5/25 (20%)	1/25 (4%)	18/23 (78%)	3/23 (13%)	2/23 (9%)
Event met my expectations	Researchers (n = 28)	6/7 (86%)	1/7 (14%)	0/7 (0%)	9/11 (82%)	1/11 (9%)	1/11 (9%)	9/10 (90%)	0/10 (0%)	1/10 (10%)
	Students (n = 70)	17/23 (74%)	3/23 (13%)	3/23 (13%)	17/24 (71%)	5/24 (21%)	2/24 (8%)	21/23 (91%)	2/23 (9%)	0/23 (0%)
Event facilitated effective networking	Researchers (n = 28)	6/7 (86%)	0/7 (0%)	1/7 (14%)	7/11 (64%)	1/11 (9%)	3/11 (27%)	8/10 (80%)	0/10 (0%)	2/10 (20%)
	Students (n = 71)	18/23 (78%)	1/23 (4%)	4/23 (17%)	18/24 (72%)	3/24 (12%)	4/24 (16%)	21/23 (91%)	1/23 (4%)	1/23 (4%)
Overall, I was satisfied with the “Meet the Researcher” event	Researchers (n = 28)	7/7 (100%)	0/7 (0%)	0/7 (0%)	9/11 (82%)	1/11 (9%)	1/11 (9%)	9/10 (90%)	0/10 (0%)	1/10 (10%)
	Students (n = 71)	17/23 (74%)	3/23 (13%)	3/23 (13%)	18/25 (72%)	4/25 (16%)	3/25 (12%)	22/23 (96%)	1/23 (4%)	0/23 (0%)
I prefer this type of event over my previous methods of finding a research supervisor/ student	Researchers (n = 27)	7/7 (100%)	0/7 (0%)	0/7 (0%)	7/10 (70%)	3/10 (30%)	0/10 (0%)	5/10 (50%)	5/10 (50%)	0/10 (0%)
	Students (n = 71)	14/23 (61%)	7/23 (30%)	2/23 (9%)	17/25 (68%)	5/25 (20%)	3/25 (12%)	16/23 (70%)	6/23 (26%)	1/23 (4%)
Matching Outcome										
Year		2017-2018			2019-2020			2021-2022		
		Yes	No	Finalizing arrangements	Yes	No	Finalizing arrangements	Yes	No	Finalizing arrangements
Did you match with a researcher/ student as a result of the “Meet the Researcher” event?	Researchers (n = 27)	3/7 (43%)	3/7 (43%)	1/7 (14%)	7/10 (70%)	2/10 (20%)	1/10 (10%)	5/10 (50%)	2/10 (20%)	3/10 (30%)
	Students (n = 71)	5/23 (22%)	17/23 (74%)	1/23 (4%)	7/25 (28%)	14/25 (56%)	4/25 (16%)	11/23 (48%)	8/23 (35%)	4/23 (17%)