

Australian Psychological Society - College of Health Psychologists: Results from a Professional Mentoring Survey and Recommendations

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Mentoring has increased in popularity and perceived impact over the past few decades—across academic and professional contexts, however less is known about the benefits within the discipline of psychology (Canter, Kessler, Odar, Aylward & Roberts, 2011; Jackson et al., 2015). Mentoring is defined as ‘a form of professional socialization whereby a more experienced individual acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and patron of a less experienced protégé...to further develop and refine the protégé’s skills, abilities, and understanding’ (pp.45; Moore & Amey, 1988), and typically focusses on earlier career professionals—from a developmental approach and based on the mentor-mentee relationship (Chaney, 2014). Mentoring can provide vast positive outcomes for both mentees (e.g., retention and recruitment; development of career and professional identity) and mentors (e.g., increased knowledge and support, encouragement, recognition; prevention of burnout, a sense of ‘giving back’; Allen, Lentz & Day, 2006; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & Dubois, 2008; Jackson et al., 2015; Nick et al., 2012; Ragins & Scandura, 1999; Shiry, 2006). Thus, mentoring warrants further development and evaluation within the psychology profession in Australia as a means to enhance professional membership, development and identity—across general and endorsed psychology areas and may have particular benefits for smaller sub-specialties (e.g., health psychology) to support needed workforce development and maintenance.

The purpose of the APS College of Health Psychologists (CHP) is to provide professional support for Health Psychologists within Australia. Professional mentoring provides the opportunity for practitioners new to the field (e.g., recent graduates) to be paired with an established practitioner who can assist in their transition to professional practice. This project aimed to better understand members’ needs for future support and development opportunities, through an online survey to assess mentoring interest and preferences. Associate Members of the College of Health Psychologists or anyone who had completed a post-graduate psychology program (e.g. Masters, Doctorate or Professional Psychology Diploma) within the past 5 years were eligible to participate. Participation was completely voluntary and consisted of any anonymous online survey (using Survey Monkey). Ethics approval was provided by Bond University (BUHREC Protocol Number: RO1937).

There were 52 respondents and 80% indicated they knew the process for becoming endorsed as a Health Psychologist. Half (56%) knew the requirements for CHP membership and 67% said they would recommend Health Psychology as a career. Of the sample, 87% were female (12% male), and 57% had graduated from their highest degree within six years. Postgraduates made up 27% of participants, with 66% indicating their highest education was a Health Psychology Masters or PhD. Three quarters of the respondents were CHP members, with 62.5% employed (and 41% were in a community clinic setting).

Of those who responded, 73% said they were interested in a mentoring program and flagged advice about endorsement requirements, employment and growing a career in health psychology were the most important aspects. While face-to-face contact was the most popular preferred mode of contact (85%), email contact was also an option for contact with 60% of the participants, while other forms of contact were less popular but still of interest to some (Telephone = 33%, Skype = 38%, Facebook = 25%). The three topics that the

participants rated as most important in influencing their willingness to be involved in a mentoring program were:

- 1) Advice about how to become more involved in the college,
- 2) Advice on networking opportunities,
- 3) Advice on professional development.

A qualitative aspect of the survey investigated the need for mentoring further and thematic analyses revealed cost and lack of time due to family and work commitments were prominent barriers to engaging in mentoring.

Future recommendations of the survey include the development of a mentoring platform to better meet the needs of recent graduates/early-career Health Psychologists. Any mentoring program should promote a range of modes of contact in addition to face-to-face contact by utilising different technologies to increase engagement (e.g. email, tele/video conference, social media).

Proposed Actions based on survey results, qualitative interviews and recommendations from a working group from the APS College Heads Forum are:

- Personalised matching of mentors and mentees with focus on mentee's needs – including support for workplace issues, professional affiliations, endorsement and career guidance;
- Initially for up to three sessions with potential for more if desired;
- The need to provide guidance about mentoring for both mentors and mentees to maximise acceptability by confirming mentees needs and providing advice about how these can be addressed;
- To ensure that this program is effective for mentees the CHP will start with a pilot that we will evaluate after 6 and 12 months; and
- Part of our evaluation will include assessing the value of mentoring in building professional identity and encouraging engagement in professional associations such as the CHP and the broader APS.

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