

Welcome to the Workforce: Exploring Gen Z Women Medical Students' Mentorship Needs, Values, and Experiences

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BACKGROUND

The incoming Canadian cohort of medical students is comprised mainly of individuals from Generation Z (Gen Z; born between 1997-2012), with over 50% of applicants identifying as female. Gen Z women learners share similarities with preceding generations of women but possess different lived experiences that influence their career and personal aspirations. While systemic barriers continue to exist for all women in medicine, the women being introduced to these challenges are now part of a generation described as increasingly tech-savvy, socially aware, and diverse. **This study explored the unique needs, values, and experiences of Gen Z women medical students and the impact of these factors on mentorship expectations.**

METHODS

Semi-structured audio-recorded interviews were conducted (February-May 2021) with 15 Gen Z women medical students from 14 different English-speaking Canadian medical schools. An iterative constant comparative team approach was utilized to explore emergent themes. Data collection occurred in tandem with analysis and continued until no new information was gathered. Verbatim transcripts were coded into categories, then grouped into themes using a using descriptive analysis.



RESULTS

Data coded into themes can be summarized in three categories: (1) Gen Z characteristics, feelings, and place in the world, (2) The gender gap and generational divide, and (3) Mentorship experiences, unmet needs, and future directions.

Gen Z characteristics, feelings, and place in the world

THEMES	Socially aware and driven changemakers	Boundless yet restricted	QUOTES "I think our generation is a lot more accepting of differences [...] we are very, I think, not only tolerant, but accepting [...] We are moving more into like acceptance and celebration of differences and diversity." "As a woman, a lot of those questions are now starting to pop up for me, like, what will my career look like? And how will that impact my family in my life outside of medicine?"	QUOTES
	Social media pressures for the tech-savvy	Non-traditional and diverse		

The gender gap and generational divide

THEMES	Not so different from the men but sometimes treated differently	Empowered yet apprehensive	QUOTES "Overall, though, I don't see myself as like too different from Gen Z guys, I think that we're finally getting into the generations where we can just like be people instead of being two genders." "I think when I'm interacting with someone who's much older, I'm somewhat more cautious at times around how they might respond to different perspectives that I have."	QUOTES
	Having tough conversations with mentors	Allies needed at all levels of medicine		

Mentorship experiences, unmet needs, & future directions

THEMES	Advice that separates and does not resonate	An essential need for diverse and women mentors	QUOTES "Maybe it's because like, of our shared experiences, like racialized people in medicine, like, there is kind of that like, understanding, I don't have to explain certain things, and neither does he." "Mentors are people who like give you advice and things like that. But sponsors are people who kind of take the next step and like, put your name forward for projects or like, introduce you to new people."	QUOTES
	Beyond mentorship - we need sponsorship	The burden placed on students		

DISCUSSION

With medical schools intentionally accepting increasingly diverse groups of students each year, we must realize that our incoming cohorts of students will necessitate comprehensive resources to support their various financial, spiritual, physical, emotional, and cultural needs.

Key interventions and considerations to better mentor Gen Z students include:

1. Recognize that all students have a unique set of lived experiences and identities that influence their career and personal development goals.
2. Diverse (e.g., BIPOC, 2SLGBTQQIA+, non-traditional) and women mentors are needed for Gen Z students to feel connected and understood.
3. Beyond mentorship, students desire sponsors who will share relevant opportunities, encourage growth, and advocate for mentees at every turn.

CONCLUSION

Mentorship is an integral part of career and personal development for all medical trainees. The growing number of women learners in Canadian medical schools necessitates a re-evaluation of mentorship delivery to account for the diverse needs and experiences of Gen Z women students.

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