

Title: Steppingstones: Helping Early Career Pediatric Hospitalists Find Their Footing

**Background:** The American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes engaging and connecting early career faculty to optimize their professional fulfillment. At the University of Colorado, Pediatric Hospital Medicine (PHM) has grown 145% in 6 years with 68% of the Denver physicians being instructors or assistant professors in the first decade of practice. As the PHM workforce and clinical demands grow, adequate early career support is missing. The impact of a career development (CD) curriculum on early career pediatric hospitalists' self-efficacy, professional fulfillment, and connectivity is unknown.

**Objective:** To assess interest in CD programming; to develop, implement, and evaluate a CD curriculum for early career pediatric hospitalists.

**Methods:** We surveyed early career pediatric hospitalists in Denver regarding faculty development needs. Based on the results, we developed Steppingstones, a yearlong program consisting of 6 seminars and professional portfolio development. Sessions were designed to be interactive, emphasizing self-reflection and small group discussions. Validated indices measuring fulfillment, autonomy, and connectivity were administered prior to participation, with a plan to reassess at program completion.

**Results:** Our survey was sent to 24 early career faculty, with a 75% response rate. Responses showed that while most felt empowered to follow career passions, 24% were unsure about pursuing academic promotions. Of those seeking promotion, 46% were unsure of their end goal. CD was rated as a top need within faculty development (61%); however, only 16% felt current offerings were very good or excellent. The most needed CD topics were identified as those rated most valuable or with low current competency. Most (94%) reported interest in a CD program, citing an up-to-date professional portfolio and clearer vision of their career as top motivators to join.

Steppingstones was implemented in Fall 2021 with 9 early career hospitalists in the first cohort. Eight were within their first 3 years as faculty. The seminar topics, based on the results of the needs assessment were: (1) Goal Setting and Faculty Ranks, (2) Career Development Plans, (3) Engagement in Career Goals and Requirements, (4) Mentorship, (5) Curricula Vitae and Dossier, and (6) Networking. To date, the cohort has attended 3 sessions and submitted components of their portfolios. Each seminar has been highly rated by all participants. Reflective practice and conversation with colleagues are identified strengths of the curriculum.

**Conclusion:** Steppingstones is a promising means to promote CD among early career pediatric hospitalists. We will build on our early success as we deliver the remainder of the curriculum and recruit our next cohort. We ultimately hope Steppingstones provides an effective framework for improving self-efficacy, fulfillment, and connectivity for early career faculty across specialties and institutions.