

First Steps: Results from the First Year of a Pediatric Hospitalist Early Career Development Curriculum

Background: Early career pediatric hospitalists (ECPH) seek career development support and clearer career visions. A yearlong, cohort-based curriculum, Steppingstones, was designed with self-determination theory in mind and launched in 2021 with 9 ECPH. With an aim to improve self-efficacy, professional fulfillment, and connectivity of ECPH, Steppingstones covers values clarification, career planning, promotions, mentorship, and networking.

Objective: To assess the effect of Steppingstones on professional fulfillment, autonomy, competence, and relatedness of ECPH.

Methods: Nine subjects and 9 controls, all instructors or assistant professors in their first 10 years, participated in this case-control study. Subjects enrolled based on self-identified interest in the curriculum. All participants completed pre- and post-intervention surveys, about one year apart (Fall 2021 and 2022). Surveys included demographics, Stanford Professional Fulfillment Index (PFI), and Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Work Scale (BPNS). We compared demographic characteristics between groups using Fisher's Exact tests, while scores on all 6 scales were compared pre- and post-curriculum using t-tests accounting for unequal variances. Accounting for paired measurements, we then fitted random-effect models to assess the influence of the curriculum on post-scores.

Results: 17 of 18 participants completed all survey components, with the post-intervention BPNS missing for 1 control. Subject and control groups had similar demographic characteristics. No significant differences were found between groups for the PFI and BPNS scales, pre- or post-curriculum. All participants showed highly varied score trajectories across time. The random-effects model confirmed that Steppingstones did not significantly influence scale scores post-curriculum. Having higher scores pre-curriculum significantly increased post-curriculum scores for all PFI scales.

Conclusion: Steppingstones participation did not significantly impact professional fulfillment or satisfaction of the basic psychologic needs as measured. While not statistically significant, score trajectories were more positive for subjects in all subscales except relatedness. Both PFI and BPNS ask participants to reflect on all job aspects, limiting the ability to detect an effect unique to Steppingstones, especially with such a small sample size. Study timing, aligned with the COVID-19 pandemic, likely confounded our results. To better understand the benefits not measured of the curriculum and the effect of the pandemic, we are pursuing a qualitative study.