

Influence of Scholarly Activity on Academic Identity Formation during Pediatric Subspecialty Fellowships: A Pilot Study

Purpose:

Academic identity formation (AIF) is a type of professional identity formation and is the continuous, transformative process through which trainees develop and grow into physicians pursuing careers in academic medicine. The literature has consistently demonstrated the importance of earlier development of strong professional identities through acquisition of knowledge and skills, effective mentorship, and engagement in a community of practice. A strong professional identity influences productivity, motivation, and career satisfaction.

AIF during subspecialty training has not been studied. Subspecialty training, with its significant scholarly requirements, represents an essential phase of AIF. Yet, our understanding and measurement of AIF during this critical time is lacking.

Objective

To pilot a survey-based tool for assessing important domains of AIF among pediatric subspecialty fellows.

Methods

Using survey methods, we performed a cross-sectional study of fellows and program directors (PD) at a single pediatric center with 15 subspecialty fellowship programs. The fellow-specific survey included questions on their scholarly experience, including a newly developed 46-item AIF scale. The AIF domains, based on a published conceptual framework and local input from educators and fellows, included: self-image, social recognition, job satisfaction, social relationships, attitude towards change, professional competence & expectations about future. Items focused on scholarly activity with a 5-point Likert scale of agreement. We also asked PDs about the importance of each domain on AIF. We used descriptive statistics to characterize the fellow cohort, scholarly activity, and AIF responses. We assessed internal consistency for the entire scale, and within each AIF domain, using Cronbach alphas.

Results

Fifty-three/106 (50%) fellows and 13/15 (87%) PDs completed a survey. Fellow respondents represented 14 different subspecialties, with even distribution of training year. Most (90%) had chosen a scholarly area, with the most common being clinical or translational research (45%), followed by education (13%) and quality improvement (13%). A majority intended to stay in academics after graduation (71%). On

average, fellows across all training years did not indicate strong agreement (average rating ≥ 4) in any domain, with weakest agreement in professional competence (3.3 + 0.2) and expectations about the future with respect to their scholarly area (3.3 + 0.4). Overall, the AIF scale items demonstrated high internal consistency (α 0.92). The inter-item reliability within domains was highest for social recognition (α 0.83), job satisfaction (α 0.88), social relationships (α 0.88), attitude towards change (α 0.81) & professional competence (α 0.83). Reliability for self-image & expectations about future were lower (α 0.62 & 0.49, respectively). In general, PDs agreed all domains could be strong positive influences on AIF.

Conclusions

This pilot study shows AIF can be measured as an overall construct but items for some domains need refinement to improve internal consistency. The findings also suggest fellows need more support during their training and scholarly pursuits to promote stronger AIF."