

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Mentorship is a critical element of capacity-building for health research as it can support career counseling, promote interest in health research and build professional networks. Few studies of mentorship have taken place in low- and middle-income countries. This paper explores the mentorship dimension of the Fogarty International Center's (FIC) support to research training in Kenya and Uganda. **Methods:** This exploratory study documents the nature of mentoring that occurred within FIC programs, considers the outcomes of mentoring, and the strengths and weaknesses of FIC trainee mentorship during and after training. Two case studies were conducted, at the University of Nairobi in Kenya and Makerere University in Uganda. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with former trainees, principal investigators and institutional leaders, exploring their perceptions of mentoring and its effects. **Results:** Mentoring aspects of FIC programs were highly valued. Respondents felt that following formal training in the US there was much still to learn about conducting research, and mentoring relationships provided support in applying for and implementing research grants. Mentoring arrangements were initially with US collaborators, but over time relationships with senior African colleagues became critical, particularly in terms of navigating university administrative systems. Mentees were typically highly motivated to pass their skills on to others, and became eager mentors later in their careers. A minority of respondents raised concerns about directive approaches to mentorship that reflect more hierarchical rather than egalitarian approaches. **Discussion:** Mentorship during and after FIC research training programs, while largely informal in nature, appears to have very positive impacts upon career development and inclination to remain in health research. Local African mentors often play a critical mentorship role, and their contributions should be better recognized.