

# Collaborative education created a new model for researchers to assess teaching methods

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By developing a collaborative team mentored approach to learning through the Medical Education Research Certificate (MERC), a committee of experienced medical education researchers created a new model that makes it possible to conduct the scientific studies needed to assess the effectiveness of medical teaching methods, Wendy Coates, MD, a Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute (LA BioMed) principal investigator writes in a study published today in *Academic Medicine*.

First developed in 2004 by the Association for American Medical Colleges' Group on Educational Affairs, MERC provides a curriculum to help medical educators acquire or enhance skills in medical education research, and to create better consumers of medical education scholarship. Traditionally, MERC courses are offered to individuals during educational meetings.

In response to a perceived need to enhance educational scholarship in Emergency Medicine, a planning committee of experienced medical education researchers who are also board-certified, full-time Emergency Medical faculty members designed a novel approach to the MERC curriculum: a mentored team approach to learning, grounded in collaborative medical education research projects. The planning committee, which was commissioned by the Council of Emergency Medicine Residency Directors (CORD), identified areas of research interest among participants and formed working groups to collaborate on research projects during standard MERC workshops.

Rather than focusing on individual questions during the course, each mentored group identified a single study hypothesis. After completing the first three workshops, group members worked under their mentors' guidance on their multi-institutional research projects.

"Prior to this, it was difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of an educational program because it was usually provided by an individual teacher instructing a small group, which made the sample size too small to measure or extrapolate to other groups of learners," said Dr. Coates, the author of the study. "By using a collaborative mentored team approach to learning how to conduct research in medical education, we were able to design studies that could be conducted at multiple institutions, creating a large enough sample of students and teachers so that future educators and researchers could measure the effectiveness of the educational programs."

She said this model will make it possible for researchers to apply the same scientific rigor to studying [medical education](#) that is used in other scientific inquiries, producing data that could ultimately improve medical training and the care physicians provide to patients.

"With proven results from a particular teaching method, we can know that method is effective one for training a particular procedure or approach to treating a patient," she said. "By ensuring we're employing the most effective educational methods, we can improve patient safety and medical outcomes."

**More information:** The study is entitled "Faculty Development in Medical Education Research: A Cooperative Model" and appears in the current issue of *Academic Medicine*, a peer-reviewed medical education journal.

Provided by Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute

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