

# Strategies for Residents to Explore Careers in Medical Education

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**P**lanning a career after residency, including the decision to pursue a fellowship, community-based job, or academic appointment, is a complex process to navigate.<sup>1–3</sup> Residents weigh several variables, including debt, salary, protected time, family, and research interests.<sup>4</sup> Because of demanding clinical responsibilities, residents find it difficult to explore opportunities that will help them make informed decisions about their postresidency careers.

These opportunities are critical because of the role they play in professional identity formation. The recommendations in this article detail opportunities for residents to explore a community of practice and engage in social interaction with educators—both key components of social learning theory.<sup>5,6</sup> This helps move interested residents from the periphery of medical education toward full participation in the community.

There are several postgraduate and faculty development fellowship programs that also foster this development.<sup>7,8</sup> These programs are valuable when available but often require a formal time commitment that is challenging for residents. Many residency programs now offer specialty-specific tracks, including medical education, to help residents explore specific scholarly interests.<sup>9–13</sup>

The decision to pursue a medical education career is often influenced by factors not commonly discussed during residency, such as scholarly productivity, national engagement, and the complexity of balancing teaching, administrative, and clinical duties.<sup>14</sup> Many junior faculty struggle to navigate these challenges after they have already begun their careers. Though recent literature provides guidance for early career medical educators,<sup>15,16</sup> there is a need to explore best practices for residents to engage in opportunities that allow for informed career decision-making during the training years.<sup>17</sup>

The recommendations provided, which are grounded in the relevant literature and our shared experiences, are designed for residents interested in medical education as well as program directors and educators looking to provide guidance. We posit that these recommendations will empower residents to explore the various career paths available in medical education.

## Identify Medical Education Mentors

The importance of mentoring has been well documented.<sup>18,19</sup> Individuals paired with mentors report improved preparation for their respective careers, better career advancement, and higher career satisfaction.<sup>20</sup> Despite the importance of mentoring, residents are not consistently engaging in these relationships to help advance their careers.<sup>21,22</sup>

Interested residents need mentorship specifically from individuals who lead medical education activities. Residents provided with preassigned mentors should seek out additional mentors with experience in medical education. Mentors can be identified through previous working relationships, recommendations from colleagues, or engagement in local, regional, and national meetings. Though there are a limited number of dedicated education research mentors for residents, there are other educators (faculty and administrators) who can help residents get early exposure to the field.<sup>18</sup>

## Explore Teaching Activities

Opportunities for residents to get hands-on teaching experience generally fall into 2 categories: those that involve medical student learners, with residents serving as preceptors for clinical skills courses or facilitators for transition to clerkship/residency programs, and those that involve resident learners, such as morbidity and mortality conferences or weekly didactic conferences. Medical schools and graduate medical education administrators are good starting points for residents looking to identify teaching opportunities. Residents might also find value engaging in professional

TABLE 1

Selected Regional and National Conferences for Health Professions Education

Professional Association	Conference	Brief Description	Time of Year	Website
Group on Educational Affairs (GEA)	Regional Meetings	Group within AAMC that is dedicated to the advancement of medical education and those who engage in it. GEA has 4 regions: Northeast, Southern, Central, and West. Each region has an annual meeting.	Spring	<a href="https://www.aamc.org/members/gea/">https://www.aamc.org/members/gea/</a>
Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)	Learn Serve Lead	Annual meeting for policymakers, administrators, educators, researchers, and learners engaged in medical education.	Fall	<a href="https://www.aamc.org/meetings/annual">https://www.aamc.org/meetings/annual</a>
Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)	Annual Educational Conference	Programming for faculty, staff, leaders, and residents engaged in graduate medical education.	Spring	<a href="https://www.acgme.org/meetings-and-events/annual-educational-conference">https://www.acgme.org/meetings-and-events/annual-educational-conference</a>
Specialty-specific conferences (eg, SAEM, CORD, APDIM, ACOG, APGO, ABIM, SGIM)	Varies	Most specialties have an annual conference with a portion of content and programming focused on education.	Varies	Conference information can generally be found by searching each specialty group.

Abbreviations: SAEM, Society of Academic Emergency Medicine; CORD, Council of Residency Directors in Emergency Medicine; APDIM, Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine; ACOG, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; APGO, Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics; ABIM, American Board of Internal Medicine; SGIM, Society of General Internal Medicine.

development through centers, institutes, or academies of teaching and learning.<sup>23</sup>

### Participate in Medical Education Projects

Projects such as research or quality improvement initiatives, curricular innovations, and presentations at meetings can augment a resident's insight into education to which they otherwise may not be exposed.<sup>24–26</sup> While initiating a project may seem daunting at first, the process of developing an innovative and publishable project is feasible with proper faculty mentorship and program support.<sup>27</sup> Residents can also collaborate on existing projects or generate their own research questions through participation in conferences, journal clubs, or by identifying challenges in their everyday clinical work. A helpful primer on initiating a medical education research project is available online.<sup>28</sup>

Additional opportunities include working with a mentor to review abstracts for medical education conferences (TABLE 1) or articles for journals (such as the *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*).<sup>29</sup> Mentor-led and group peer reviews are a growing practice among educators to increase the quality of reviews and the skills of reviewers.<sup>30,31</sup>

### Attend Medical Education Conferences

Encouraging residents to immerse themselves in the medical education community, even if only for a few sessions at a conference, can give them an idea of whether medical education is a path they want to pursue. A great place to start are national and regional education conferences (TABLE 1).

In addition to attending sessions at conferences, residents can also engage with educators about their scholarship. Conferences provide access to content and mentors beyond one's own institution and are one of the best ways to network in the medical education community. Conversations at the coffee station can be as instructive as formal sessions.<sup>32</sup> Conferences also offer residents an opportunity to present their projects to a wide audience of educators, which can lead to opportunities for collaboration outside of their local institution.<sup>33</sup>

### Harness Relevant Online and Social Media Resources

With the advent of Free Open Access Medical Education (FOAM),<sup>34</sup> conferences are no longer the only way that educators can interact to share ideas. Since the FOAM world can be overwhelming, a practical roadmap may be helpful.<sup>35</sup> Getting involved

**TABLE 2**  
Selected Professional Development Opportunities in Health Professions Education

Program	Brief Description	Website
Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) Program	One-year certificate program offered by the AAMC for developing best practices in medical education leaders.	<a href="https://www.aamc.org/members/gea/lead">https://www.aamc.org/members/gea/lead</a>
Medical Education Research Certificate (MERC) Program	Self-paced certificate program offered by the AAMC in which participants attend at least 6 workshops on the design and implementation of medical education research.	<a href="https://www.aamc.org/members/gea/merc">https://www.aamc.org/members/gea/merc</a>
Harvard Macy Institute	Offers a variety of professional development courses for health professions educators.	<a href="http://www.harvardmacy.org">http://www.harvardmacy.org</a>
Clinical Teaching Program	One-month selective program offered by the Stanford Faculty Development Center to prepare participants to effectively deliver and facilitate workshops at their home institutions.	<a href="http://sfdc.stanford.edu/clinical_teaching.html">http://sfdc.stanford.edu/clinical_teaching.html</a>
Teaching Academies	Institution-based communities of educators that offer professional development.	Varies by institution, but comprehensive listing available here: <a href="http://www.academiescollaborative.com">http://www.academiescollaborative.com</a>

Abbreviation: AAMC, Association of American Medical Colleges.

with FOAM provides many benefits for residents, including access to high-quality, evidence-based medical education resources and the ability to interact with medical education journals, blogs, and educators without having to meet them in person at a conference.

Residents can also benefit by regularly reviewing current medical education literature, which is available through table of contents (TOC) alerts from some of the prominent journals in medical education. A list of journals publishing educational research in the health professions is available online.<sup>36</sup>

### Consider Formal Training in Medical Education

A range of professional development opportunities exist for residents (TABLE 2), ranging from conferences and certificate programs to masters or doctoral degrees.<sup>37–39</sup> Despite a common misconception that such programs are not available to residents, many of these programs welcome resident learners, and a growing number can be completed fully or partially online.<sup>40</sup>

Another option is a medical education fellowship.<sup>41–44</sup> These 1- and 2-year mentored experiences allow fellows protected time to develop skills as medical educators, engage in scholarship, and develop professional niches.<sup>45</sup> Many of these fellowships incorporate degree or certificate programs as well. In addition to a fellowship, many institutions have faculty development programs open to residents.<sup>7</sup> Residents should seek out individuals at their

institution who have completed such programs to discuss the benefits of participating early in their careers.

### Conclusions

Residents weigh several factors as they choose among various career options. Finding time to explore these options is a challenge for residents who seek to make informed career decisions but are unsure how to practically approach this daunting task. The recommendations in this article are meant to provide practical advice for residents (and those advising them) interested in exploring medical education as a potential career path.

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