



## Original Contributions



### THE PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS FOR VOLUNTEER RESEARCH ASSISTANTS IN A PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

Patrick E. Steadman, MSc,\* Johanna Crudden, RT,† Taline Naranian, MSc,† John Paul Oliveria, BSc,†‡ and  
Kathy Boutis, MD†

\*Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, †Division of Emergency Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, The  
Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and ‡Department of Medicine, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Reprint Address: Kathy Boutis, MD, The Hospital for Sick Children, 555 University Avenue, Toronto, ON M5G 1X8, Canada

**Abstract—Background:** Emergency departments (EDs) have utilized university student volunteers to facilitate enrollment of patients into prospective studies; however, the impact of this experience on participant careers is relatively unknown. **Objectives:** We determined the proportion of successful postgraduate school/research job applications supported by our program reference letter. We also examined participant satisfaction. **Methods:** This was a prospective cohort study of volunteer research assistants in a tertiary care pediatric ED from September 2011 to July 2013. Students volunteered one 5-h shift per week for at least 6 months. They completed three surveys: 1) Entrance – demographics and goals for entering the ED research assistant program; 2) Exit – program satisfaction, reasons for leaving the program, and future career goals; 3) Follow-up – survey and e-mails were sent to record positions secured since leaving the program. **Results:** There were a total of 920 applicants over the study period, and 127 volunteers were selected to participate in the program. Response rates for entrance, exit, and follow-up surveys were 100%, 84.9%, and 96.2%, respectively. Of the participants who left and responded, 89/101 (88.9%) obtained school/research positions supported by our program reference letter. Further, 72.6% ranked their satisfaction with the program at least a 7 on a 10-point categorical scale, and 82.9% reported that they “agreed/strongly agreed” that the program helped with their career goals. **Conclusions:** A volunteer student program is in high demand for university students interested in health sciences/research and potentially has a beneficial career impact for its participants. © 2015 Elsevier Inc.

**Keywords—research; data collection; education; funding; volunteer; hospital volunteers; emergency care**

### INTRODUCTION

In the last 15 years, some emergency departments (ED) have developed and implemented student-based research assistant programs (1–4). Such programs provide a daily on-site research presence for the purposes of screening and enrolling potentially eligible patients into a wide variety of studies. In many of these programs, students participate for course credit at the affiliated university (1,4–6). Whereas other ED research assistant programs similarly include students, they are different in that their participants are entirely volunteers, and therefore do not receive money or formal academic credit for their participation.

In the course-based model, research has shown that 82% of student participants considered these research assistant programs a good introduction to clinical research, and 97% found it useful in planning for a career in health care (1). Another study showed an 86% retention rate into a second term that was achieved based primarily on participant enjoyment and the incentive of course credit (4). However, these results may not be generalizable to participants that are volunteers because learning, satisfaction, and impact on career may be highly motivated by the



fact that course-based participants are graded at the end of their 4-month block (4). Thus, evidence on the student experience at a volunteer-based research assistant program in the ED is currently lacking.

The main objective of this research was to determine the proportion of graduating student volunteers with successful applications to postgraduate schools or research positions for which our ED research assistant program provided a reference letter. We also examined volunteer satisfaction with the program and how often students agreed that the program helped them in their career goals.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### *Study Design and Setting*

This was a prospective cohort study of volunteer research assistants in a tertiary care pediatric ED from September 2011 to July 2013. The study hospital's ED treats approximately 65,000 patients per year and functions as a clinical, teaching, and research hospital. The study institution's research ethics board approved this research.

### *Program Description, Management, and Research Studies*

These details are reported in a related manuscript by the authors (7). In brief, it includes 42 volunteers every 6 months that provide double coverage for each of three daily shifts: 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.; 1:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.; and 6:00 p.m.–11:00 p.m. The program is directed by a pediatric emergency physician who has clinical, research, and education responsibilities. The program has a full-time manager who has training as a research coordinator and is familiar with the studies and specific operations.

### *Study Population*

Volunteer participants are recruited by advertising with the local university, and details of screening, hiring, and orientation of the volunteers are reported elsewhere (7). Briefly, after all participants are credentialed and completed all required certification, they attend a session for orientation to the program and the studies currently enrolling in the program. They also attend two paired shifts in the ED over 2 weeks, where they learn about how to effectively screen and enroll from outgoing student volunteers. The volunteers are all required to complete a minimum of 23 5-h shifts over a 6-month period. All volunteers who participate in this program consented to collection of demographics, performance review, participation in surveys during and after exiting the program, and to potentially have their de-identified data used for research purposes. There are no exclusion criteria.

### *Data Collection*

Study data were collected and managed using REDCap electronic data capture tools hosted at the study institution (8). It was developed for the ED research assistant program and finalized in February 2011. For the purposes of this study, this database included the number of applicants to the program each session, demographics on successful applicants, and data from the three surveys detailed below. Student participants were expected to complete these surveys as part of the program requirements, but except for the entrance survey, completion of subsequent surveys was not mandatory. The domains of each survey (with the respective number of questions) were as follows:

*Entrance survey.* Volunteer demographics (2 questions); current university status, grade point average, and expected graduation (6 questions); goals for entering the student volunteer program (1 question); career plans.

*Exit survey.* Career plans (1 question); reasons for leaving the program (1 question); likes/dislikes about the program (3 questions); student volunteer program's ability to facilitate career goals (2 questions); educational/professional positions accepted since starting student volunteer (3 questions); general comments (1 question).

*Follow-up (every 6 months for 1 year) survey.* Career interests (1 question); educational/professional positions accepted since starting as a student volunteer (4 questions); general comments (1 question). For those who did not respond to the survey, individual e-mails were sent specifically asking about professional positions secured since leaving the program.

The items for each survey were developed in accordance with the methods advocated by Streiner and Norman, Burns et al., and the relevant literature (1–4,9–11). Questions were generated until no new items emerged over five consensus-based sessions by the ED research assistant program director, manager, and three student volunteers. The items were then pretested on 10 student volunteers and pilot-tested on 50 volunteers over two consecutive 6-month sessions (February 2010–January 2011). Testing was performed on volunteers distinct from the study sample. Survey questions were removed or modified in accordance with feedback from all testing phases. In its final form, each survey took approximately 5 min to complete.

### *Outcomes*

Our primary outcome was the proportion of volunteers who obtained a position (school or employment) where the application was supported by a reference letter from



Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3245909>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3245909>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)