Experience of participating in a mastermind group

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Aim
The aim was to describe postdoctoral researchers’ (n=5) experiences in a mastermind group.

Conclusions
Taking part in a mastermind group can be extremely effective in shifting focus from the negatives of a challenge faced by group members to the positives of a potential solution.

Background
The importance of mentoring for success is well documented. The academic career path is seldom straightforward. Many postgraduate and PhD students and postdoctoral fellows have uncertain employment opportunities, and the sick-leave rates are high in these groups. Joining a collegial support group, a so-called mastermind group, could be one way of coping with the challenges.

Context
The mastermind group was established at the Medical Faculty, Lund University, Sweden. It was initiated by the faculty career center during a training course for postdoctoral researchers. The mastermind group was formed by five early career researchers within the medical sciences, representing different areas of clinical expertise (physiotherapy, nursing, global health, and speech-language pathology). The group held 2-3 meetings per semester, each meeting lasting 2 h. The meeting’s structure includes about 20 to 30 min focus on each member’s choice of a topic and/or update report. The team members provide feedback in addition to a follow-up of previous topics, aiming at supporting each member’s career. Another important point is the sharing of information about career building possibilities.

Topics in the mastermind meetings
- The scientific writing process and publication strategies
- Balance between work and leisure time
- Authorship on publications
- How to write a CV
- Leadership skills
- Short and long perspectives of career goals
- Job applications, interviews and tests
- Navigating and networking in the research community

Results
Three themes as a result of joining this group emerged:
1. A place that offers conversation in confidence
2. Opportunity for personal and professional development
3. A “breathing hole”

“For me, it has been valuable with a small forum with the opportunity to speak freely, ie in confidence, about what is relevant, both disappointments and success.”

“I really like this breathing hole where you can get power.”

“I have been able to think a bit higher, dare to dream a bit bigger, and have space to share both difficult and fun experiences safely.”

“To me, the meetings have been a “safe spot” where I have been given the opportunity to express thoughts that I otherwise did not have a clear forum for.”