The ROLE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FORMAL TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

INTRODUCTION

Research administrators play a pivotal role in the training and mentoring of early career researchers. These roles face internal challenges which include limited research skills and experience, lack of research funding & grants writing skills, lack of mentorship, lack of timeous recruitment of eligible trainees, and insufficient work-life balance. In addition, they have inadequate support to implement new technologies and data management needs. The role of the research administrator extends to advising and training research administrators, assisting in grant proposals, and ensuring the trainees in grants programs and journals have adequate training in research administration.

ROLE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS

Grants Management

Grants coordination to the recruitment of trainees, orientation of resources, training, research, methodology, planning and other research program activities, including timelines and milestones.

Coordination

Coordination of the recruitment of trainees, orientation of resources, training, research, methodology, planning and other research program activities, including timelines and milestones.

ICT Support

Managing the web portal for the program where trainees and mentors upload progress reports and evidence materials, providing training on using REDCap and data management support to mentors and trainees.

Financial Management

Assisting the trainees to develop comprehensive budgets for their mentored research projects, training in grants management and managing the grant document process for the program.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Overseeing the program comprehensive evaluation including tracking of key research outputs, innovations, and impact.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM MENTORSHIP CASE STUDY

The "Promoting Excellence in Research and Faculty Enhanced Career Training (PERFECT)” project was implemented by the University of Zimbabwe Faculty of Medicine Health Sciences (UZFMHS). The program was implemented from 2015 to 2020 targeting a total of 33 trainees. The overarching goal of the program was to enhance capacity of junior faculty to conduct impactful research in HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular diseases (CVD), mental health and reproductive health through a rigorous program of mentored research training and career development.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The research administrators for the mentorship program comprised of Programme Director, Training Coordinator, Grants Coordinator, Finance and Administration Officer, IT Specialist, and M&E Officer.

- Mentoring early career researchers enables them to smoothly transition into mature and seasoned researchers.
- Research administration makes mentorship program more efficient and easier to manage.
- Institutional commitment to provide protected time for early career researchers willing to enrol for the mentorship program is key.
- Research administration makes mentorship program more efficient and easier to manage.

Challenges for the research administrators in implementing the program:

- Lack of institutional support and administrative backing.
- Poor commitment from some mentors.
- Lack of financial support to sustain program activities.
- COVID-19 disrupted program activities.

CONCLUSION

The specific objectives were as follows:

1. Enhance capacity of junior faculty to conduct impactful research in HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular diseases (CVD), mental health and reproductive health through a rigorous program of mentored research training and career development.
2. Contact obstetric and practical research training to address both group-wide and individual capacity needs.
3. Enhance research administration and support of junior faculty through access to resources at the UZFMHS Research Support Centre (RSC).
4. Capitalise on and improve on information Communication Technology (ICT) and eLibrary resources at the college site.
5. To conduct formative and summative program evaluations.