A time banking system to support workplace flexibility

Corresponding author
Magali A. Fassiotto, PhD
Stanford University School of Medicine
magali.fassiotto@stanford.edu

Co-author
Yvonne A. Maldonado, MD

Learning objectives
1. Understand the characteristics of an intervention to reduce work-life conflict among medical faculty
2. Develop strategies to acknowledge employees’ previously unrecognized institutional service activities
3. Engage medical teams to think about work-life flexibility as a team, rather than individually

Context/background
U.S. physicians experience greater burnout and dissatisfaction with work-life balance than other U.S. working adults.\(^1\) In academic medicine, physician shortages, an aging workforce and persistent gender gaps in senior roles, have led to calls to adapt workforce practices.\(^2,3\) While employers today often embrace flex policies, policies are underused and their presence alone insufficiently addresses ongoing work-life needs of medical faculty. To circumvent flexibility policies deemed at odds with the culture of academic medicine, faculty informally trade favors; however, the absence of formal mechanisms recognizing this trading leads to discomfort in asking for favors in return, compounding work-life challenges. In response, Stanford Medicine developed the Academic Biomedical Career Customization (ABCC) pilot program, including a banking system to recognize behaviors supporting workplace flexibility.

Methods/approach
The time-banking intervention measures unacknowledged teaching, service and clinical activities, and acknowledges them with practical rewards. The general framework requires that participating teams identify tasks that: (1) are uncompensated or not adequately recognized and/or (2) benefit other team members’ flexibility. Examples of credit-earning tasks include: filling a colleague’s clinical service on short notice, mentoring students/trainees, and institutional/national committee service. Credits are redeemed for support services meant to benefit career and personal goals by alleviating time pressure and promoting career success: at home (e.g., housecleaning, laundry, meal delivery) or work (e.g., grant-writing, lab management, PowerPoint design).

Findings/results
Five teams (N=60) participated in ABCC from 2013–2014: 57 percent women (N=34); 75 percent clinical faculty (N=45). Pre- and post-surveys captured multiple dimensions of program impact across six scales: perception of control over time/resources (α=.85); support for a culture of flexibility (α=.85); support from colleagues (α=.82); wellness (α=.86); understanding professional development opportunities (α=.80); and institutional/job satisfaction (α=.88). Four scales showed increases in satisfaction in post-surveys: support for a culture of flexibility (P=.020); wellness (P=.013); understanding professional development opportunities (P=.036); and institutional/job satisfaction (P=.020).

Conclusions/discussion
The ABCC pilot time-banking system addresses work-life challenges in medical school faculty leading to reported benefits to physician health and job satisfaction. Banking credits reduced guilt associated with asking others for help and encouraged biomedical faculty team members to take on shared responsibilities when able or reduce workload when needed, thus increasing flexibility across teams. Making flexibility central to team processes allows for recognition around the type and amount of extracurricular service work performed. At relatively low department cost, recognition can, in turn, increase job satisfaction, wellness and perceptions of work-life flexibility.