11-2006

Meeting Challenges in Caring for Patients with Disabilities: An Interclerkship Course

Julie A. Jonassen
University of Massachusetts Medical School, Julie.Jonassen@umassmed.edu

Susan V. Barrett
University of Massachusetts Medical School, Susan.Barrett@umassmed.edu

Linda M. Long-Bellil
University of Massachusetts Medical School, Linda.Long@umassmed.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Authors
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MEETING CHALLENGES IN CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH DISABILITIES: AN INTERCLERKSHIP COURSE
Julie A. Jonassen1, Susan V. Barrett2, Linda Long-Bellili3, Candace Cassin2, Dee O’Connor3, Mai-Lan Rogoff2,4, Martin H. Young4
1Department of Psychology, 2Office of Medical Education, 3Center for Health Policy Research, 4Department of Psychiatry
University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, Massachusetts and 5Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation

Abstract
Purpose: Patients with disabilities face healthcare services more than those without disabilities, yet healthcare systems often fail to address these differences. Understanding the impact of disabilities on physical and cognitive development is essential to provide appropriate healthcare. A one-day Interclerkship introduced third-year medical students to key challenges for physicians who care for disabled patients: (1) building trust and confidence, (2) communicating, (3) anticipating secondary medical conditions, (4) identifying symptom onset, (5) understanding symptom onset, (6) interpreting disability status, (7) summarizing and integrating knowledge about disabilities, (8) prioritizing problems, (9) implementing appropriate care, and (10) obtaining or communicating patient consent.

Methodology: Essential elements of patient-centered care for disabled individuals and patients with disabilities was presented in a 3-hour session. In small groups, students practiced medical interviewing with physical or developmental disabilities, their families and their community representatives. Discussions about advances in medical care for disabled patients, using real-life case scenarios. Students then worked in small groups to identify challenges for patients with disabilities, and understand the essential elements of patient-centered care. A facilitated small group discussion followed.

Results: There was a high grade of student participation, and students’ self-assessments that rated themselves as highly competent in understanding medical care for disabled patients (pre: 3.22 (sd=.53); post: 3.99 (sd=.37)). Students agreed or strongly agreed that the Interclerkship addressed a topic important to medical education.

Conclusion: A single-day Interclerkship successfully improved third-year medical students’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills on appropriate medical care for disabled patient.

Overview and Background
Since AY1995-1996, Interclerkships—short, intensive 1- day courses interspersed between clerkships—have introduced 3rd-year UMass Medical students to subjects that spanned traditional biomedial sciences. Interclerkships were initially intended to combine basic science, clinical, psychological, legal and ethical perspectives on topics historically underestimated in medical education. Interclerkships emphasize acquisition of new knowledge and skills not previously taught in the medical curriculum.

The impact of disabilities on medical care clearly represents an area of profound importance to the practice of medicine. In this topic, ethics plays an important part.

Workshop: Students select two

Workshop: Children and Childhood for People with Disabling Disabilities

Workshop: Sexualities and People with Cognitive Disabilities

Workshop: Physical and Cognitive Disability: The In's and Outs

Workshop: Working with Individuals with Spinal Cord Injuries

Workshop: MR/MI Dual Diagnosis

Workshop: Finding Community Resources

Workshop: Assisive Technology

Workshop: Ethics and End of Life Care

Bladder Management in Disabled Populations

The Physician’s Role in Special Education Decisions

Course Source and Description
Students participated in lectures and numerous small group workshops during this one-day Interclerkship. In facilitated small groups, students met with individuals with physical or developmental disabilities and their families and their community advocates, sharing a dialogue about healthcare and access concerns. Other workshops, taught by clinical and community experts, addressed advanced technology, parenting families with special needs and mental health, community resources, sexuality, and end-of-life care. Students and completed pre- and post-Interclerkship self-assessments that rated their knowledge, skills, and attitudes about medical care for disabled patients. Students participated in small group workshops and facilitated the course.

Student Feedback
Feedback collected from 69 (69%) of the students who participated in this Interclerkship: that included a large majority agreed that the Interclerkship was very valuable to their education.

Favorable Student Feedback

Positive Outcomes and Strong Student Feedback

Pre- and Post-Interclerkship Assessment Scale

Pre- to Post- Interclerkship Improvement in Students’ self-assessed Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills about Medical Care for Disabled Patients (measured with the scale to the right).

Pre-Interclerkship

Post-Interclerkship

Score

Disagree

Strongly

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly

Neutral

Score

2% 14% 77% 6%

4% 6% 68% 22%

6% 10% 70% 16%

2% 15% 72% 13%

1% 5% 67% 26%

0% 3% 65% 32%

1% 5% 67% 26%

1% 13% 70% 18%

2% 15% 72% 13%

1% 5% 67% 26%

0% 3% 65% 32%

1% 5% 67% 26%

1% 13% 70% 18%

1% 5% 67% 26%

1% 13% 70% 18%

1% 5% 67% 26%

1% 13% 70% 18%

1% 5% 67% 26%

1% 13% 70% 18%

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank the individuals and their families from disabilities, disability management, and from the community who offered workshops and facilitated the small group dialogues between students and patients.