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

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Overview and Background

Since 1995-1998, Interclerkships—wherein 2-week-long 1-2 day courses interspersed between clerkships—have introduced third-year UMass medical students to subjects that transcended traditional biomedical education. Interclerkships were initially intended to combine basic science, clinical, psychological, legal and ethical perspectives on topics historically underrepresented 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, yet this topic had been poorly represented in the undergraduate medical curriculum. An Interclerkship addressing disabilities was launched in 2002 and primarily focused on developmental disabilities until a recent collaboration between the Medical School and the Center for Disability and Rehabilitation geared it new to a more multidisciplinary Interclerkship. Working with People with Disabilities is the first Interclerkship for People with Disabilities (APY-0405). Here we describe the curriculum and its impact on students' knowledge, attitudes, and confidence in addressing medical and psychosocial issues for patients with disabilities. Data from the APY-0505/2006 program are presented; they are comparable to the outcomes obtained from the APY-0405-2006 Interclerkship.

Source Description and Evaluation

Students participated in lectures and numerous small group workshops during this one-day Interclerkship. In facilitated small groups, students worked 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 assistive technology, parenting, career development, as well as greater community resources. Students self-assessed knowledge, skills, and attitudes about medical care for disabled patients. A Likert scale self-assessment was included in the course feedback.

(See Table 1) Students were provided a course feedback.

Results:

Results: There was a high level of agreement (4-100%) in 2005 in the response of students' self-assessed attitudes, knowledge, and skills in scores concerning medical care for disabled patients (93.22, 5.32): post-3.49, 3.71 (p=0.00). The students agreed strongly or strongly agreed that the Interclerkship addressed a topic essential to training, providing knowledge and skills that were not obtained in medical education.

Conclusions:

Conclusion: A single-day Interclerkship successfully improved third-year medical students' self-assessed knowledge, attitudes, and skills in providing appropriate medical care for disabled patients.

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