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MEETING CHALLENGES IN CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH DISABILITIES: AN INTERCLERKSHIP COURSE
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Abstract

Purpose: People with disabilities use healthcare services more than those without disabilities, yet healthcare systems often fail to understand these individuals. Understanding the needs of those with physical and cognitive disabilities is essential to providing appropriate healthcare. A one-day Interclerkship introduced third-year medical students to key challenges for physicians who care for disabled patients.1) built trust and confidence, (2) communicated, (3) anticipated secondary medical care, (4) appropriately modifying clinical evaluations and (5) not stigmatizing patients.

Methodology: Essential elements of patient-centered care for disabled individuals were experienced in a pre-session. In small groups, students worked with patients with physical or developmental disabilities, their families and their community advocates, discussing healthcare and access concerns. Other workshops, taught by clinical and community experts, addressed assistive technology, parenting and nutrition, and community resources, sexual issues, and aging. So far (65) students completed pre- and post-interclerkship self-assessments that included psychosocial, skills, attitudes and knowledge about medical care for disabled patients, using a standardized 5-point Likert scale. Mean scores were compared post-test. Students also completed a post-clerkship course feedback instrument.

Results: There was a highly significant (p < 0.001) pre-to post-CLerkship improvement in students' self-assessed knowledge, attitudes, and skills on providing appropriate medical care for disabled patient.

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

Overview and Background

Since AV 1995-1996, Interclerkships—short, one-two 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 AV 2002-03 and primarily focused on developmental disabilities until a recent interdisciplinary collaboration between the Macdonough School and the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation gave rise to a new, multidisciplinary Interclerkship, Working with People with Disabilities in the Clinical Setting: Course Objectives

Working with People with Disabilities in the Clinical Setting: Learning Objectives

This interclerkship will enable student to:
- Approach physical and cognitive disabilities in a manner that builds trust and confidence.
- Anticipate potential secondary medical conditions related to a disability and work as partners with their patients to maximize health and well-being.
- Modify the clinical encounter when necessary to work with a person with a disability.
- Identify resources in the community.

What is the interclerkship about?

The interclerkship: Caring for people with disabilities is the focus of this one-day Interclerkship. It is designed for third-year medical students and is based on the premise that caring for people with disabilities is an essential part of the medical school experience.

Why should you participate?

1. I am aware of the challenges that family members of people with disabilities may experience when they seek medical care for their loved one.
2. I am aware of the challenges that people with disabilities may experience when they seek medical care.
3. I am aware of why my own experiences and beliefs about people with disabilities affect my work with people in the community.
4. I am aware of my self-assessed knowledge and skills on providing appropriate medical care for disabled patients.
5. I am aware of how my own experiences and beliefs about people with disabilities affect my work with people in the community.
6. I am aware of the challenges that family members of people with disabilities may experience when they seek medical care for their loved one.
7. I know how to modify the clinical encounter when necessary for working with a person with a disability.
8. I am aware of how my own experiences and beliefs about people with disabilities affect my work with people in the community. This Interclerkship included a large majority agreement that this topic is essential to their training as physicians.
9. I know how to modify the clinical encounter when necessary for working with a person with a disability.
10. I am aware of my own experiences and beliefs about people with disabilities affect my work with people in the community.

Call to Action

- We would like to thank the individuals and their families who generously shared their stories with us in this Interclerkship.
- We are grateful to the many faculty from UMass Medical School, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation and from the community who participated in this Interclerkship and facilitated the small group dialogues between students and patients.

Acknowledgements

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 assistive technology, parenting and nutrition, and community resources, sexual issues, and aging. From the AV 2005/2006 program are presented; they are comparable to the outcomes obtained from the AV 2004-2005 Interclerkship. A summary of these results has been previously presented in a poster session at the 2005 AHA annual meeting. Students also completed a post-clerkship course feedback instrument.

Workshop: Caring for people with disabilities

This workshop examines the ethics and challenges of caring for people with disabilities. The presentation provided students with examples of case studies relevant to the topics discussed in this Interclerkship. We are also grateful to the many faculty from UMass Medical School, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation and from the community who participated in this Interclerkship and facilitated the small group dialogues between students and patients.