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ABSTRACT

CHEERING FOR TEAMS IN THE COMMUNITY: TEACHING ADVOCACY TO MEDICAL STUDENTS. Ashraf Sabe¹, Philip Chen¹, Melissa Smith-Parrish¹, and Allison Brindle, M.D.². ¹*Case Western Reserve University*; ²*Cleveland Clinic Foundation*.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM: Residency Review Committees and professional organizations emphasize physician advocacy and community involvement. Traditional medical student education has not included structured education on the fundamental principles of physician advocacy. Given the other rigorous requirements of medical education, incorporating distinct advocacy training into medical school curricula is challenging.

OBJECTIVES: 1.) Define advocacy, the role of the physician advocate, and the legislative process to medical students 2.) Determine the optimal format for teaching and learning advocacy principles 3.) Identify relevant advocacy skills for physician advocates 4.) Offer medical students a venue to apply and practice advocacy skills.

DESCRIPTION: Medical students will participate in group exercises and self-directed learning activities to enhance their advocacy education through didactic lectures, workshops, and experiential components. During the first year, weekly didactic sessions will provide students with necessary physician advocate tools. Introductory topics could include defining advocacy, defining the role of physicians in the community, building community networks, contacting legislators, and working with the media. Legislators, members of the media, and experienced physician advocates are examples of appropriate speakers for these sessions. Following an advocacy lecture, students will work in groups of 5-10 to practice their skills and receive peer feedback.

Interested students may later pursue an advocacy elective, applying skills to a chosen community health issue. Students will identify and partner with established community groups advocating locally for the students' chosen theme. During their involvement with these grassroots organizations, students will identify relevant items on the local, state, or federal legislative agenda and use evidence based medical literature to contact elected officials regarding the group's position. Students will journal experiences and meet with a faculty member overseeing their progress. Students will present their work to their classmates and faculty mentors. Senior medical students who are passionate physician advocates should have an opportunity to pursue a detailed advocacy project in fulfillment of their senior thesis requirement.

FINDINGS TO DATE: A review of the medical education literature describes efforts to educate students on selected advocacy topics. There is sparse literature describing implementation of structured advocacy education into medical student curricula, although it has been successfully implemented into some residency programs, specifically pediatric and family medicine training programs. A pediatric advocacy rotation designed by one of the authors was successfully changed resident attitudes and behaviors regarding community involvement and advocacy.

KEY LESSON LEARNED SO FAR: Pre-clinical medical students focused on gaining knowledge to pass USMLE exams may find physician advocacy topics irrelevant. For students who are passionate advocates, they may have difficulty securing protected time to pursue advocacy work.

QUESTIONS: 1). Will skills and knowledge gained in this course carry over into practicing physicians? 2). Will skills and knowledge gained in this course translate into improved patient care?

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