

Providing New Curriculum Content For Health Professional Education



Medical, nursing, pharmacy, and other health professions schools are expanding their curricula to equip students and trainees with the skills and knowledge that are critical to providing high-quality, patient-centered care, including courses on patient safety, quality improvement, professionalism, population health, health economics, and more.

EXPANDING THE FOCUS BEYOND SCIENCE

America's health professions schools have always provided their undergraduate and graduate students with a thorough grounding in science through courses such as anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pathology, pharmacology, and microbiology.

But the realities of practicing in today's healthcare system—one that demands high-quality, coordinated care and improved outcomes for an aging and increasingly diverse patient population—require health professions students to develop expertise beyond diagnosing and treating disease. Now, they must learn to provide care that is responsive to individual patients and entire communities, that is both efficient and accountable, and that delivers exceptional value for limited dollars.



BUILDING NEW SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

Many of today's health professions students are learning new skills which are quickly becoming fundamental to healthcare practice. For example:

- Patient safety and quality improvement.
- Professionalism, which instructs students in professional standards, such as a code of conduct; a dedication to life-long learning; and humanistic values like empathy, compassion, and social justice.
- Population health, which prepares health professionals to address public health problems, narrow health disparities, and advance prevention efforts, such as immunizations.
- Health policy and medical economics, which helps foster a greater understanding of how health care is organized and financed.

Health professions students seek instruction in these and other areas because they recognize that the demands on healthcare providers are shifting rapidly and that expertise in these areas will improve their ability to effectively care for patients.



OVERCOMING HURDLES TO IMPLEMENTATION

There are logistical and philosophical challenges involved in integrating new content into existing curricula, including:

- Justifying space in already full, well-established curricula.
- Bringing together students from different professions. Interprofessional education is a central strategy for teaching quality and safety, but faces a number of logistical hurdles. Not only is it difficult to align the academic calendars of students in different health professions programs, it often is hard to find a classroom or clinical setting in which to convene.
- Finding faculty to teach the new curricula. These subjects were not part of the educational tradition of current professors and administrators—at the same time that faculty are researching, designing, and implementing new courses they also must learn how best to teach them.
- Changing institutional culture. There naturally is some skepticism and hesitation among leadership and faculty to move toward a new way of teaching and uproot traditions embedded within health professions education.

PROMISING MODELS

GEISINGER HEALTH SYSTEM

At Geisinger, medical and nursing trainees learn about quality improvement and teamwork through a series of hands-on exercises to solve real-world quality problems.

INSTITUTE ON MEDICINE AS A PROFESSION

Macy and IMAP are partnering with academic medical centers nationally to design and implement model programs to teach professionalism to students and residents. Efforts include teaching medical students to advocate for patients' interests and teaching medical residents how to solicit constructive feedback on their performance.

MAYO CLINIC

Mayo uses a “teach-the-teacher” program, in which health professions faculty learn how to instruct their students about the fundamentals of quality improvement, how to use quality improvement tools, and how to optimize patient safety.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Macy Faculty Scholar Dr. Jennifer Myers has developed a quality improvement track that engages medical residents in the quality and safety activities of their teaching institution through practical and educational experiences.

Other Macy Faculty Scholars also are working on patient safety and quality curricular, including Dr. Ted James at the University of Vermont and Dr. Wendy Madigosky at the University of Colorado.

REFERENCES FOR RELEVANT MACY SUPPORTED WORK

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