

MEDICAL EDUCATION AT A STUDENT-RUN HEALTH CLINIC

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BACKGROUND: Despite the proliferation of medical student-run health clinics, the impact of these programs on medical education has not been evaluated. Educators have noted these clinics' value for teaching clinical skills, fostering medical humanism, and providing students opportunities for community activism. Notably, the early stage of training during which many medical students volunteer with these programs can magnify the influence of student-run clinics in medical education.

METHODS: To allow broad investigation of an unexplored topic, we used semi-structured interviews with volunteers and patients in one medical student-run clinic. We developed a thematic coding system, and each interview was coded by two independent reviewers. We complemented these findings with a survey of second-year, pre-clinical medical students.

RESULTS: We interviewed 5 faculty, 8 medical students, and 14 patients to achieve thematic saturation. The survey response rate was 91% (141/155). Faculty were motivated to volunteer as a community service and also considered the clinic valuable for teaching clinical and communication skills, clinical pathology, and imparting the philosophy of service on students. Medical students volunteered to learn clinical skills, serve the poor, and spend time with patients before formal rotations. Although prior clinical experience did not predict students' volunteerism, students did learn many new skills. More than one-third of a medical school class first learned to take a patient history and present a patient to an attending physician at a student-run clinic. Learning to take a blood pressure and blood sugar were other frequently learned techniques. Students gained an appreciation of patients' background, but their changes in attitudes towards patients were not always positive: most did not consider themselves more empathetic for having volunteered, for example, and one student questioned patients' motivations for wanting medication. Patients were active, conscious participants in the clinic's educational environment – they recognized clinic workers as students and discussed their personal contributions to students' experiences.



Medical students learn many new clinical in this setting – often taught by older students.

CONCLUSIONS: Student-run health clinics are significant, influential venues for medical students to acquire skills and interact with patients. This work clarifies educators' expectations for a student-run clinic, but also suggests that students' experiences do not always mirror these expectations. Despite being advantageous in other regards, this student-run clinic is not a vehicle for fostering medical humanism among students. This discord between students and faculty does not suggest an educational failure so much as it highlights a need for further consideration of student-run clinics' growing impact in medical education. Ultimately, these programs epitomize a synergistic relationship between academic medicine and the community: patients receive beneficial services that may otherwise be unavailable for them, and students may benefit from unique clinical experiences.