

Abstract: Public Health and Medicine: The Role of Physicians in Society

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BACKGROUND: Medical students are often lacking in knowledge and skills pertaining to the field of public health and its specific relevance to the practice of medicine. The fields of public health and clinical medicine must work together to achieve optimal levels of improvement in overall health and quality of care, resulting in preventing harm and providing effective interventions to protect patients.¹

METHODS: We implemented a revised six-week block of instruction for 2nd year medical students, based on socioecological models of health and health care delivery. Students in two consecutive academic years participated by: 1) reading key articles pertaining to public health, health care policy, physician advocacy, social determinants of health, health equity, and cultural humility; 2) working through a simulated epidemiological public health outbreak investigation involving a case of Hepatitis C, with emphasis on responding to the crisis using an interprofessional approach; 3) reflecting on a clinical case involving the opioid crisis; 4) compiling a list of public health issues, from which three issues were voted upon by the class and debated in a team format. Students provided weekly formative feedback (written comments) on each of the six course modules, completed an end-of-course summative feedback process and provided suggestions for improvement.

RESULTS: All 84 students (100%) completed end of block summative feedback surveys, which consisted of 10 items. Mean ratings on a 1-5 scale ranged from 3.8 to 4.5. Students were more enthusiastic about clinically-focused experiences, but also indicated positive support for public health/policy discussions as well as the clinical outbreak investigation exercise.

CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION: A revised public health block of instruction for 2nd year medical students, which featured elements of interprofessional education, was a success. Future iterations of the course will involve more in-depth exploration of policy issues as well as increased opportunities for clinically-focused activities.