

Health Mentors Program Reflection Essays



Jen Starrs
Occupational Therapy

The Health Mentors Program has given me the opportunity to experience interprofessional teamwork and has provided me with an understanding of how a medical diagnosis can impact quality of life. Meeting with

our health mentor at his home as a team was an enriching experience; being able to speak with our mentor in a personal setting allowed for open communication about living life as a diabetic and the challenges that come with this condition. Working as a team was challenging at first, but after introductions and our visit at our health mentor's home, we were able to work collaboratively on group assignments. This collaboration culminated in our final project of advocacy. Meeting with our health mentor for a second time on Jefferson's campus gave us a better understanding of what issue was most significantly impacting our mentor's life. After

identifying our health mentor's desire and the need for a better policy for the safe disposal of sharps, we were able to gather information on the existing protocols and navigate a course of action for political change.

Working as an interprofessional team (occupational therapy, nursing, medical, and physician assistant) allowed for a greater appreciation of what each profession has to offer. It was interesting to hear the difference in what other professions were thinking about our health mentor's condition compared to what I had in mind with my occupational therapy lens. While nursing, medicine, and PA were concentrated on the medical side of a diabetes diagnosis, I was attuned to how this diagnosis impacts function. It was, however, a collaborative effort, given that nursing informed me on how often insulin needs to be administered and I was able to provide suggestions for medication management, coping strategies, and environmental adaptations. As a team, we were able to work together to understand our health mentor's diagnosis, how this impacts his life, and how we could better advocate for his needs. Overall, the

process of meeting with our health mentor, working as a team, and advocating for political change was a rewarding experience. The experience provided me with a sense of accomplishment because I now know that I have the ability to work and contribute as a team member in the medical field.

Although plans were not made for future encounters, the Health Mentors Program has provided me with a basis of how to work effectively on a medical team. I have gained insight from this experience that I will carry with me into my professional future. For example, I now understand the importance of storytelling with patients and clients; getting a better picture of how a diagnosis impacts daily living can help to improve how we address medical concerns. Additionally, I have learned the importance of clear, articulate communication and how this affects teamwork; specifically, how written directions are better than verbal directions and can help to eliminate confusion within the group. In future professional groups, I will work to ensure effective communication by being concise and explicit when giving directions and organizing meeting times.



Rachel Fogley
Medicine

As I tried to find my way to the conference room of the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center, Tony appeared out of a doorway with a big smile and a warm "hello." I entered the small room and was immediately

overcome by our mentor's generosity: trays of hoagies, pizza, chips, and a variety of

beverages, all for us. "It's from Celebre's. They've got the best pizza in Philly." As usual, our group spent the first portion of our meeting discussing food and family with our mentor. Tony grew up in South Philadelphia. As an Italian, he was raised on his mom's sauce. He married the girl across the street, Cheryl, and together they have four girls and two boys, many who live close to home. This Monday, in the conference room, we talk cannolis. I've brought a box from Termini Brothers, as per Tony's recommendation. Tony tells us his daughter is expecting a baby in February and describes Sunday football traditions with his family now that it's Eagles

season. We segue into our Module 3 prompt and, before we head out the door, Tony insists we all take doggie bags. He pulls out a box of Ziploc baggies: "I brought these so you could take some with you. Make sure you get some sweet peppers and some 'mozz.'"

I remain deeply moved by all of our team interactions with Tony, but especially this last one. In the short time we've known Tony, he has displayed such generosity of spirit. I feel grateful and honored to have him as our mentor and proud that our group was able to foster a meaningful relationship with him

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in such a short amount of time. We have gotten to know Tony as a person--not just as a patient or a disease--and have learned what is most important to him in life. I do not regret that we spent just as much time getting to know Tony as discussing our prompts because, to me, this was the most interesting and rewarding part of the Health Mentors Program.

My experience with Tony and the Health Mentors Program has been a reminder of the

importance of developing relationships with patients and making an effort to understand what they value and who they are outside of their diseases. As a practicing clinician, I aspire to express the same curiosity with patients that our group did with Tony, in order to better know them. In the end, patients benefit from a good relationship with physicians, as they receive medical care from someone who views them as an individual, not merely a disease, and who is ideally familiar with their wishes, values, and

life circumstances. In return, as our group has already experienced with Tony, the physician is rewarded by establishing human connections with patients through the discussion of mutual interests and the wealth of experiences by which patients educate doctors. Tony has certainly educated and inspired us to approach life's challenges with a positive attitude.