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Teaching Junior Medical Students About the Current Health Care System

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Teaching Junior Medical Students About the Current Health Care System

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In the last few years, dramatic changes have occurred in the way that health care is delivered and financed in the United States. Most academic medical centers have been slow in helping students understand what these changes will mean for them as they enter practice.[1] Teaching how the current health care system is financed and managed falls outside the traditional range of the more clinically oriented content that students must master during their third year of medical school. Not only are medical students inadequately taught skills they need to understand medicine's changing environment, but many students have negative feelings towards managed care.

To address this need for better training, faculty at Jefferson Medical College developed four one-hour sessions for third-year medical students rotating through the required family medicine clerkship. A study was conducted in an attempt to measure the impact of the seminars on students' attitudes towards managed care.

The curriculum included student-led discussions of assigned readings on topics including Medicare, Medicaid, practice guidelines, and physician report cards from journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Modules developed by David B. Nash, MD, MBA on various aspects of managed care were also used.

A thirty-three item questionnaire developed and previously given at Jefferson Medical College was administered to the students before and after the seminars to evaluate any changes in attitudes towards the evolving health care system.[2] Eight of the items surveyed showed significant changes after the seminar series, including a more negative feeling about non-physician health care providers, a greater appreciation of the need for physicians to become more actively involved with social issues, and a greater understanding of the financial aspects of medicine.

Other significant changes demonstrated that some students had a more positive view of managed care. For example, prior to the survey, 50% of the students agreed with the statement "physicians involved in HMOs or other types of managed care have the same dedication to their patients as physicians in fee for service." After the seminars, 70% of students agreed (P=.0045). The 97.8% of students who rated the seminar series gave it a mean rating of 4.5 in response to the statement "the seminars on managed care were useful to me," with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree.[3]

The study demonstrated how a series of student-led seminars could make students aware of how the changing health care environment will affect their practice of medicine. Students' perceptions of certain aspects of the health care environment were changed significantly, and the students gained a deeper understanding of what their futures are likely to be.

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