

5th Annual Interclerkship Day: Improving Patient Safety January 7, 2008

For the fifth year in a row, Jefferson Medical College third-year students received a proverbial “crash course” in patient safety on January 7 at Interclerkship Day. Designed to change medical students’ attitudes and beliefs about medical errors and patient safety,¹ the annual event delivers lessons based on the aviation safety model of crew resource management and provides training in how best to avoid medical errors. Sponsored by the Dean’s Office and organized and moderated by David B. Nash, MD, MBA, Chair of the Department of Health Policy, the program features nationally recognized speakers and focused workshops.

The two keynote speakers were John J. Nance, JD, a national aviation safety expert and founding board member of the National Patient Safety Foundation; and John-Henry Pfifferling, PhD, director and founder of the Center for Professional Well-Being in Durham, North Carolina. In the afternoon, students chose from among a selection of 8 breakout sessions, each featuring a topic germane to safe medical practice. The day concluded with a discussion by Jefferson Medical College Associate Dean, Charles Pohl, MD, on preparing for the residency match.

John Nance, a former airline pilot and ABC News aviation analyst, provided a compelling overview of the airline industry’s safety record, while drawing a convincing parallel with medicine, in terms of the professions’ priority on safety. (The airline industry has long been recognized as a leader in safety initiatives and its example is being replicated in medicine. For example, the airlines’ “LifeWings”² patient safety program has been adopted locally by Methodist Hospital, and was the subject of a workshop at Interclerkship Day, led by Dr. Melvin Moses, Chief of Surgery at TJU/Methodist Hospital.)

Nance’s talk emphasized the importance of creating a “safe” professional environment in which all members of the care team are encouraged to share safety concerns. The optimal environment would allow the most junior member of the team to speak up and point out a potential error. Nance concedes this can be difficult under the best of circumstances, but that it shouldn’t be, providing that the right organizational culture is established. Nance maintains that communication is the cornerstone of an open, non-fear-based learning culture.

Following Nance, Dr. Pfifferling's presentations advocate a learning culture that supports error reporting transparency and a team-based approach. A medical anthropologist who has long studied stress among medical residents, Dr. Pfifferling examined these themes from a psycho-social perspective, focusing on the role of self-care in well-being and professional performance. Given the intense stressors medical students and physicians experience, they are particularly vulnerable to stress-related sequelae. As a result, patients stand to suffer. Pfifferling discussed how the typical medical school culture affects well-being, and provided ample examples of stress-combating techniques, including increasing awareness of – and letting go of – potentially damaging mindsets, such as perfectionism.

Included in the afternoon program were breakout sessions devoted to discussing a medical error with a patient; standardizing order sets to improve safety; apology and disclosure; and case studies about near misses.

The Department of Health Policy thanks Michael Vergare, MD Interim Dean of Thomas Jefferson University; Susan L. Rattner, MD, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Internal Medicine; and the members of the JMC Curriculum Committee for their work on behalf of Interclerkship Day. In his opening remarks, Dr. Nash acknowledged the passing of Philip J. Wolfson, MD, Professor of Surgery, who is remembered for his enduring commitment to the students of Jefferson Medical College, and to this program.

References

1. Moskowitz E, Veloski JJ, Fields SK, Nash DB. Development and evaluation of a 1-day clerkship program for medical students on medical errors and patient safety. *Am J Med Quality*. 2007;22:13-17.
2. George, John. Patient-safety program takes flight at Methodist Hospital. *Philadelphia Business Journal*, March 23, 2007.