

6th Annual Interclerkship Day: Improving Patient Safety

January 5, 2009

The 6th Annual Interclerkship Day on Improving Patient Safety was a unique opportunity for Jefferson Medical College's (JMC) 3rd year students to explore their own attitudes and beliefs about medical error, disclosure, and patient safety, while benefiting from lessons learned from the aviation model of crew resource management and its application to medicine. Sponsored by Office of the Dean of JMC and the Jefferson School of Population Health (JSPH), the program was moderated by David B. Nash, MD, MBA, the founding Dean of JSHP. The day opened with a welcome from Michael J. Vergare, MD, Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs for Thomas Jefferson University.

The keynote speaker was internationally known aviation safety expert, John J. Nance, JD. Nance is the founding board member of the National Patient Safety Foundation; a former airline pilot; and a broadcast analyst on aviation for ABC News. He presented compelling evidence illustrating how medicine can use techniques from the airline industry to improve patient safety and increase professionalism. He emphasized the importance of communication and the creation of an environment and culture that allows a junior team member to actively participate and speak up if something is amiss. This type of environment fosters teamwork while ultimately improving patient safety.

Improving patient safety must include an understanding of one's errors. David W. Andrews, MD, FACS, Director of Neuro-Oncologic Neurosurgery and Stereotactic Radiology shared, with great honesty and humility, his own story of a medical error. This helped the audience to process the reality of what might actually lead to a medical error and how everyone is affected by it. Daniel F. Ryan, Esq. then discussed the legal implications of medical error, including disclosure and apology.

Following the morning presentations, students had the opportunity to meet Mark L. Tykocinski, MD, the new Dean of Jefferson Medical College, as he discussed his background and role during a luncheon presentation. Dr. Tykocinski was

formerly the Simon Flexner Professor and Chair of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. As Dean of JMC he is responsible for the educational, research, and clinical missions of the college.

The afternoon program began with an award presentation to Jay Scott, Executive Director of Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation. The inaugural Patient Advocacy Recognition Award honored the Foundation for their outstanding regional and national work advocating for the rights of patients and their families. Following the ceremony, Mr. Scott shared a poignant story about the initial time period when his daughter Alex first developed symptoms of her disease and the frustrations he encountered early on when trying to get a diagnosis, appropriate care, and effective treatment. It was a moving and emotional story which revealed the shortcomings of the medical system and highlighted opportunities for improvement. Mr. Scott's take-home message for the students was to *listen*.

The next presentation focused on recognizing barriers to physician disclosure. Joseph Spiegel, MD, Associate Director of Otolaryngology at Jefferson, explained how fears—particularly fears of lawsuits—can serve to hinder disclosure and trust. Guilt and shame, patient-provider perceptions and expectations also impede disclosure. Dr. Spiegel suggests that increasing confidence in the law and reforms to policies are some of the steps that will help to encourage disclosure.

It can be very difficult to communicate a bad outcome to patients and families. Jason Baxter, MD, MSCP, Assistant Professor in the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine, offered a very interactive presentation and dynamic exchange with the audience that helped to characterize the elements of a successful encounter with patients and families. Through the use of case scenarios and student involvement in role-plays, the audience observed important skills, actions, language, and non-verbal cues which enhance the provider-patient encounter and lead to patient satisfaction.

This particular clerkship program provides an important venue for integrating patient safety issues into educational programming for JMC students and it will continue to thrive in future years to come. ■