Early Identification and Remediation of Medical Students’ Communication Skills

Laurie Whitman, MSE, Kelly Poszywak, MS, Paula Ross, PhD, Monica Lypson, MD, MHPE, FACP
Office of Medical Student Education, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI

Objective/Purpose
Identify medical students with low performance in communication skills early in pre-clinical education and provide additional training.

Need for Innovation
There is increasing evidence for enhanced provider communication skills as a tool to improve patient outcomes. Often students who struggle with communication skills are not identified early enough in their training to ensure they are successful on subsequent school and national assessments.

Methods

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<td>Identified 59 first year medical students scoring between 70 and 80% on the required medical interview standardized patient session. These students were strongly encouraged to sign up for the Office Hours Program (OHP).</td>
<td>• Identify &amp; understand the relevance and application of communication skills in a patient interview • Identify one’s own communication strengths &amp; weaknesses • Practice &amp; apply previous SPI feedback • Practice and apply self-directed goals</td>
<td>• Review selected articles • Review reference video interview • Personal performance video and feedback review • Office Hours Program SPI interview</td>
<td>• Student self-assessment • Communication skills checklist • Student self-assessment checklist</td>
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Outcomes

Using the same scoring criteria as the first year medical interview, the 22 students who participated in the OHP increased their mean communication skills score from 73% to 86%. Also, none of these students failed communication skills on the second year comprehensive pre-clinical OSCE which assesses communication skills across multiple stations. 7 of the 37 students who declined the OHP invitation and 12 non-invited students failed the communication skills portion of the same exam.

Mean Communication Skills Score 73%
Mean Communication Skills Score 86%
Office Hours Skills Score 86%

Strengths and areas of improvement
• The OHP provides students with a flexible, yet rigorous, method for improving their communication skills prior to high-stakes examinations
• We are adapting the program to include clinical year students as we review performance on clerkship-related SP exercises in preparation for a high-stakes, fourth year comprehensive OSCE

Feasibility
The OHP could easily be transferred to others schools with existing standardized patient programs:
• Establish a baseline communication skills score with a SPI interview
• Oversee student preparation
• Ensure accurate student self-assessment
• Provide a second SPI interview with timely feedback from the SPI

REFERENCES