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Health Literacy Education Initiative (HLEI): improving patient health literacy while enhancing physician assistant patient education skills

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OBJECTIVE

The University of North Texas Health Science Library (UNTHSC) in conjunction with the Physician Assistant Studies program sought to increase the health literacy of caregivers of pediatric patients while increasing Physician Assistant student patient education skills. Students received instruction in the essential components of health literacy and subsequently utilized those techniques to instruct patients in basic wellness concepts.

TARGET POPULATION

The target population included both parents and caregivers of pediatric patients visiting the Patient Care Clinic of the University of North Texas Health Science Center and students enrolled in the Physician Assistant Studies program of the Health Science Center.

The University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) is comprised of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the School of Public Health and the Physician Assistant Studies Program.

PA population:

The Physician Assistant program was established at the Health Science Center in 1997.

Eighty-nine students are currently enrolled in the PA studies program. Graduates of the PA Studies program are awarded the Masters of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) degree. The MPAS is a 3 year program which includes clinical rotations at health care facilities throughout the Dallas Fort Worth region and the State of Texas.

The MPAS degree prepares students to work collaboratively with physicians as part of the health care team. "Physician assistants are health care professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. PAs practice in the areas of primary care medicine including family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology -- as well in surgery and the surgical subspecialties." [1]

Patient population:

The Patient Care Clinic Pediatric demographic is 64% minority with Hispanic and Black patients representing the largest portion of patients seen by the clinic. Thirty-three (33%) percent of patients are Hispanic and 23 % are Black. The majority of visitors to the clinic are lower income patients with 47% of the patient population receiving public assistance.

Approximately 10,000 pediatric patients are seen per year, producing approximately 27,000 patient visits per year. (2.7 visits per patient) Sixty percent (60%) of patients visit the clinic for an annual well-check while the remaining pediatric patients most often present with allergic rhinitis, otitis media, pharyngitis, and upper respiratory infections. [2]

The majority of the pediatric patient population visiting the Patient Care facility receive public assistance and 55% are Medicaid participants. Parents/caregivers of pediatric patients were the focus of this initiative since they serve as the intermediary between the healthcare provider and the patient.

TYPICAL PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT DUTIES

- Taking medical histories
- Conducting physical examinations
- Ordering diagnostic tests
- Initiating therapy and prescribing medications
- Assisting in surgery
- Making hospital rounds and updating charts
- Managing medical emergencies
- Developing and implementing treatment plans
- Advising patients on preventive health care and the management of problems
- Conferring with physicians and other health care professionals on treatment plans [3]

METHOD

Two audiences were targeted to receive health literacy instruction. Instruction was provided to students enrolled in the Physician Assistant program and caregivers of pediatric patients.

Student training included instructional sessions describing the concepts of health literacy, effective patient-health professional communication, and techniques for searching the MedlinePlus database. Instructional sessions were conducted by PA Studies faculty, Tarrant County Public Health Department health educators and the Outreach librarian.

PA Students subsequently conducted patient education sessions comprised of patients and caregivers visiting the Pediatric Patient Care building for scheduled office visits. Patient education sessions consisted of fifty-five 15 minute presentations utilizing laptop's connected to the internet to demonstrate how to search for consumer health information from the NLM.

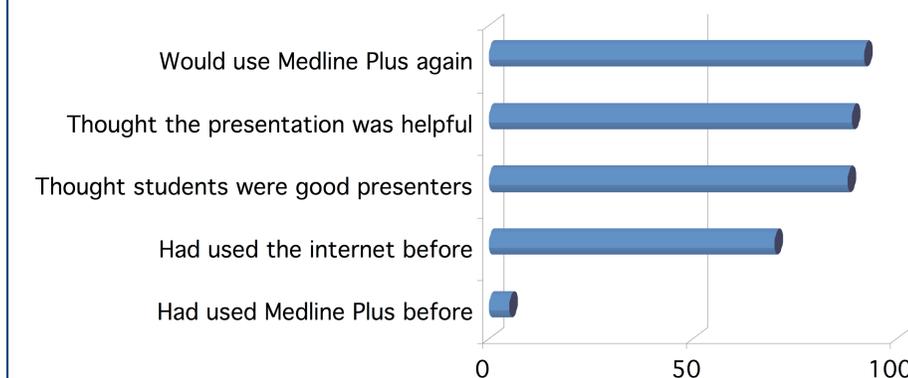
Surveys were completed by students and patients to determine participant perceptions of instruction quality and satisfaction with MedlinePlus as a patient education tool.

Educational Session	Instructor	Audience	Participants
Health Literacy Overview	Physician Assistant Studies Professor	Physician Assistant Studies Students	31 attendees
Health Literacy Education a) Health Literacy info from the AMA b) Communicating with your patient	Health Educator, Tarrant County Public Health Department 1	Physician Assistant Studies Students	31 attendees
NLM Patient Education Tools a) MedlinePlus.gov database b) Easy to read features	Outreach Librarian, UNTHSC	Physician Assistant Studies Students	31 attendees
Patient Education Sessions a) Taking your child's temperature b) Accessing info via MedlinePlus.gov	Physician Assistant Studies Students	Parents/Caregivers of Pediatric Patients	69 participants

EVALUATION

Evaluative data was collected via survey instruments distributed to both students and patients. Patient education sessions conducted by students were assessed by two survey instruments to determine patient satisfaction with information obtained during these instructional sessions, and a self-evaluation completed by the student presenter to determine student perceptions of how well they covered the objectives for the presentation.

Patient Satisfaction %



RESULTS/OUTCOME

This project reached two audiences: the healthcare/information consumer and the patient educator. The PA student acquired lifelong teaching skills that may be utilized as they spend their careers educating patients in the appropriate use of medical information. Caregivers became better consumers of health information while learning information seeking techniques. The program was initially offered from February 2007 through May 2007. The program was extended and will be offered from January 2008 through May 2008. Comparative data from both sessions will be synthesized to determine participant satisfaction.

COLLABORATIVE AGENCIES/FUNDING

The Gibson D. Lewis Health Science Library of the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) collaborated with the Physician Assistant Studies Program of the UNTHSC and the Tarrant County Public Health agency to develop the HLEI program and educational offerings.

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- [1] AAPA American Academy of Physician Assistants. *Information about PAs and the PA profession*. Retrieved September 21, 2006 from <http://www.aapa.org/geninfo1.html>
- [2] Fling, J. *Pediatric clinic facts and figures*. (2005, September) Internal unpublished document of the University of North Texas Health Science Center Pediatric Patient Care Department.
- [3] University of North Texas Health Science Center Physician Assistant Studies. *Physician Assistant Studies*