

Introduction

The Student Family Healthcare Center (SFHCC) is the oldest student-run clinic in the nation. It was founded in 1967 to provide free healthcare to the underserved population of Newark, NJ while giving New Jersey Medical School students the opportunity for clinical experience. Many years ago, the student-directors of the SFHCC began Patient Education Sessions in order to increase health education and awareness of various health issues among SFHCC patients. These sessions were hour-long presentations developed by medical students for patients and their families. In September 2011, the Health Literacy Project (HLP) was begun in order to improve upon this initiative through collaboration with UMDNJ health literacy fellows and changes in the format of presentations.

The main goal of the HLP is to provide interactive, health-literacy sensitive workshops which aim to empower our patients with information and skills necessary to become active participants in their healthcare. Simultaneously, the process of developing these workshops will cultivate the development of future physicians, equipped to communicate clearly and effectively with patients of varying literacy levels and from diverse backgrounds.

Methods

Health Literacy Project Overview

Each month, one patient education workshop is developed by a group of four medical students. The topics of the health workshops are assigned to the students based on the month and include preventive topics such as "diet and nutrition" and disease-specific topics such as "hypertension" and "diabetes." Students are contacted one month in advance of their workshop date to begin requirements for the Health Literacy Project outlined below.

Figure 1. Health Literacy Project Group Requirements



Student Recruitment

All students who participate in SFHCC are invited to participate by e-mail. Interested students are organized into a group of four students - a first, second, third, and fourth year. An incentive for students to participate is that they receive 3 "clinic credits" (the equivalent of 3 clinic visits) after completion of all requirements.

Health Literacy Training

Developed and given by 2011-2012 health literacy fellows at UMDNJ, this one-hour class aims to increase students' understanding of health literacy. It includes the (1) definition and implications of health literacy, (2) strategies to communicate clearly and effectively, and (3) the teach-back method. These educational themes are then incorporated into health-literacy sensitive health workshops.

Lesson Plan Development

Students create a unique lesson plan for their workshop with guidance from a provided template. The lesson plan template encourages interactive lessons, activities that empower patients with specific health-literacy skills, and actionable goals created by the patient using a "patient action plan."

Lesson Plan Template

- 1. Introductions/ice-breaker: 5-10 minute**
 - Creates a welcoming environment
 - Helps you establish the audience members' experience with and baseline understanding of your health topic
- 2. Discussion of health education objectives (3 or less key points): 10-15 minutes**
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- 3. Interactive skill development activity: 15-20 minutes**

In your description, please address the following:

 - a. What skills will you teach/develop?
 - b. How will your patient use this skill to achieve better health?
 - c. How will you determine whether or not the patient can demonstrate the skill and use it in their lives?
 - d. What materials/tools will you utilize? (i.e. video, visual aids, hand-outs, demonstration kits).
 - e. Be creative! Keep your audience interacting and engaged!
- 4. "Patient Action Plan" (Attached): 10-15 minutes**

Please work with the participants as they fill out their personal "action plans." You may choose to discuss them afterwards.
- 5. Questions/Discussion: 10-15 minutes**

Please leave sufficient time for discussion of questions. In the event that the audience does not have specific questions, please have a few discussion items that serve to summarize your key points.
- 6. Handout:** Please give patients a one-page handout pertaining to your topic. You may include parts of your presentation or any other resource that you think will be useful.

Patient Action Plan

Topic of workshop _____
Date _____

Things we talked about/Things I need to do:

Action Plan

One goal I want to achieve that will improve my health:

One specific step I can take to achieve this goal:

What:

How Much:

When:

How Often:

How sure am I that I can do this?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not sure Very sure

Patient Recruitment

Each student group is required to participate in patient outreach for their own presentations. This is accomplished by developing a flyer that is distributed to our patients during clinic hours. In addition, students make phone calls to interested patients using a patient database. Finally, patients who are called for reminder appointments on the day of a presentation are invited to bring family and friends to participate in our health workshops during their clinic appointment.

Results

Figure 2. Health Literacy Project Monthly

Month	Health Literacy Project Topic	Number of Patients in Attendance
October 2011	Nutrition and exercise	3
November 2011	Cold, Flu, and Allergies	2
December 2011	Hypertension	9
January 2012	Depression and Anxiety	2
February 2012	Diabetes	6
March 2012	Asthma	2
April 2012	Cholesterol and Management	12
April 2012	Hypertension	50
Community Outreach		
May 2012	Smoking Cessation	2
May 2012	Nutrition and Exercise	N/A

Figure 3. Percentage of SFHCC Students By Class Year

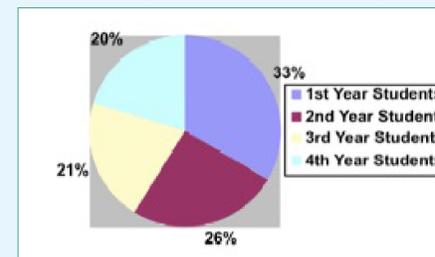


Figure 4. Percentage of SFHCC Students Trained in Health Literacy by Class Year

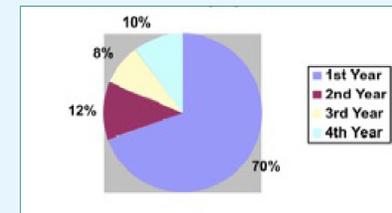
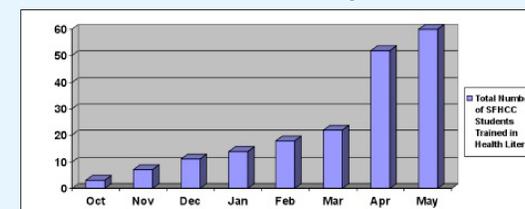


Figure 5. Total Number of SFHCC Students Trained in Health Literacy



Discussion

There is an important relationship between low health literacy and poor health outcomes (Paasche-Orlow and Wolf, 2007). For this reason it is important to train health care providers to be well equipped to face the challenges of low health literacy among our patients. The health literacy training provided through the HLP will ideally help trainees prepare for these challenges. After completing the project, we have seen medical students express an increase in awareness and comfort with health literacy knowledge, communication skills and behaviors.

Currently, only 14.8% of students participating in SFHCC have been trained in health literacy. By the end of the 2012-2013 academic year, we hope to see this percentage greatly increase through efforts to hold health literacy training sessions more often and for all students, regardless of their participation in the HLP.

First-year medical students represent the largest percentage of those trained in health literacy. By targeting the underclassman we hope that the skills learned through health literacy training become a natural part of their communication and interaction with patients. Integrating health literacy training early in their careers will prevent these future physicians from adopting poor habits that do not foster the development of health literacy among patients.

One of the biggest challenges of the Health Literacy Project is patient attendance. Some months have relatively high attendance while other months have relatively low attendance. We will modify the topics for next year's series of presentations in hopes of increasing attendance at all sessions. Surveying patients to discover their topics interests, as well as focusing on the popular topics from this year, are two possible ways we can attempt to attract more patients next year.

In conclusion, the Health Literacy Project of the SFHCC hopes to improve the health literacy of SFHCC patients through monthly education sessions that aims to give them the knowledge and skills to become active participants in their healthcare.

Conclusion and Future Recommendations

The future direction of the Health Literacy Project includes long and short-term goals. In the short-term we hope to survey patients and the medical students that participate in the HLP. We plan to give medical students a self-assessment before participating in the HLP and afterwards to determine if the health literacy training is effective. We would also like to incorporate educational materials from the Health Literacy Project into a set of materials to be distributed to SFHCC patients at their medical visit.

Our long-term goals include creating a module that would allow the Health Literacy Project to be replicated in other student-run clinics in the United States. We hope that eventually health literacy training will be integrated into the curriculum of all medical schools and residency training programs across the nation as it is important to the future of healthcare in this country.

For more information about our clinic, visit: <http://njms.umdnj.edu/community/SFHCC/index.cfm>

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the UMDNJ Health Literacy Fellows for their dedication and mentorship in the Health Literacy Project. We would also like to thank the students of the SFHCC who devote their limited time to being learners and teachers of health literacy.

References:
Paasche-Orlow, Michael K., and Michael S. Wolf. "The Causal Pathways Linking Health Literacy to Health Outcomes." *American Journal of Health Behavior* 31 (2007): S20-26.