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Improving physician-patient relationship by enhancing medical students' interpersonal and communication skills through small group activities

Improved physician-patient relationship is an integral part of medical practice. When treating patients, physicians need to fulfill various roles in their daily clinical activities such as educators, counselors, advocates, and many other interpersonal tasks. In order to succeed in these roles, physicians must be excellent communicators. Physicians develop many skill sets during undergraduate medical education. This study focuses on effective methods to enhance medical students' interpersonal and communication skills through small group activities. The various small group activities in the first and second years of the medical curriculum include Problem-Based learning (PBL), Inquiry (IQ) Cases, Student-Led Inquiry (SLIQ) Cases, Clinical Skills, Science of Clinical Practice and Clinical Learning Group. Eight students are assigned to each group and an experienced facilitator is assigned to facilitate the activities. Prior to the beginning of the activities, facilitators are required to attend faculty development sessions. In addition, facilitators meet weekly with course directors to discuss student progress and concerns. Several methods are used to assess students' interpersonal and communication skills in these small group activities. Some of the assessment methods are verbal peer feedback at the end of each session, mid-block and final

facilitator narrative feedback, narrative self-assessment and narrative peer feedback. Since students receive vigorous training on interpersonal and communication skills and are assessed numerous times in the first two years of the medical curriculum, the number of students with inappropriate interpersonal and communication skills in the clinical year (3rd) is extremely minimal. The small group activities give students an effective platform to enhance their interpersonal and communication skills, which are critical for practicing physicians in the contemporary health care system.

Speaker Biography

Gimol Thomas George, a Harvard Macy Scholar, is currently employed at the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine (CoM), Florida Atlantic University (FAU) as an Assistant Professor of Integrated Medical Science and the Director of Program Evaluation and Assessment. Prior to joining FAU CoM, she worked at Nova Southeastern University College of Dental Medicine as the Director of Assessment & Educational Specialist as well as the Director for Effective Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methodology course in the Postdoctoral Program. She has been affiliated with several universities in various capacities, including serving as a Ph.D. Thesis Advisor/Examiner. During her academic career, she earned a Doctoral Degree in Education with a specialty in Human Resources Development. She has been published internationally and has received various awards and recognitions for her contributions in academia.

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