

Abstract:

Pathway to Family Medicine for Community College Students

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Introduction:

In the article “Community College Pathways: Improving the U.S. Physician Workforce¹” the authors found that “applicants who attended a community college after high school and before a 4-year university had lower odds of acceptance into medical school. Compared to medical students who never attended a community college, first-CC matriculants were more likely to have parents without a college education and higher odds of intentions to practice in underserved.”¹ Community colleges serve as a pathway to higher education for many low income and underserved students.² As part of the AAFP’s Health Equity Fellowship for the year of 2023, this project addressed Health Equity through education, by mentoring community college students and fostering interest in Family Medicine early on in their educational journey.

Purpose:

To establish partnership with Lake County Community College; Exposed underserved students to family medicine through workshops, shadowing opportunities and individual mentoring; Ensure project sustainability by incorporating it into the community medicine curriculum of Northwestern Family Medicine Residency at Lake Forest by December 2023.

Methods:

A partnership was established with the Community College of Lake County Waukegan campus after meetings were held with Dean Jesus Ruiz. Permission to start this mentorship program was also obtained from the Northwestern’s Lake Forest residency program director Dr. Ravenna, and Dr. King who is the director for the community medicine rotation at the residency program. The program management for community affairs for Northwestern’s Lake Forest hospital, Natalie Arriola assisted in providing the forms the students needed to complete in order to obtain permission and clearance to come to the hospital and engage in fellowship activities. Interested students were recruited from the community college’s class of certified nursing assistant. As part of their CNA class, students did their clinicals at Lake Forest Hospital, which facilitated access to the hospital grounds. Prior to in person workshops, I met with a total of eight students individually to provide mentoring. Two hour zoom meetings were held with each student, with mentoring on how to transfer from a Community College to a four-year university, how to become competitive applicants to medical school, on medical school curriculum, and the pathway to becoming a fully licensed family medicine physician. After the individual mentoring portion of the program, students received an in-person tour of the simulation lab and participated in workshops for suturing and vital signs. Participants were surveyed in order to assess knowledge of topics taught during mentoring and workshop activities.

Results:

Knowledge of pre and post mentorship/workshop activities was measured by surveying participants. Though 8 students were mentored individually, 2 were not able to attend the in-person workshops. Out of the six students who attended the workshops, four responded to the surveys. When asked about workshop ideas for the future, one of the respondents mentioned considering a workshop on IV access, otherwise respondents were very satisfied with the structured of the program as it is. All respondents noted that the mentorship program helped them with their careers by increasing awareness of future opportunities. Two respondents noted that thanks to the fellowship workshops and networking opportunities, they secured a job as certified nursing assistants at the hospital as a result. They also learned that Northwestern has a program that sponsors certified nurse assistants to pursue a nursing degree by funding their education and plan on pursuing this opportunity. Additionally, three of four respondents noted they are more likely to consider family medicine as a career in the future after participating in the mentorship activities. One participant is not considering medicine as a career because the length of training is “too long”. The participant did report however that he plans to use the knowledge he obtained, to mentor his younger cousin who is immigrating from Africa to the US and is interested in a medical career. Discussion: Though not all participants responded to the survey, participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with the program. Mentorship materials were shared with Northwestern leadership including faculty member Dr. Joyce King, who is in charge of the community medicine curriculum at The Northwestern Family Medicine Lake Forest program. The materials will be utilized by future residents the continuous mentorship of other community college students. Future residents will benefit not only from the already completed mentorship materials and surveys, but also by the partnership that was established with the Lake County Community College, ensuring sustainability of the project as originally intended. Participants got to complete individual mentoring and workshops but have not yet shadowed residents in clinic. They have however, signed paperwork provided by Natalie Arriola, program manager for Lake Forest Hospital’s community affairs, that will allow them to do so in the future. This will also be a good opportunity to get other family medicine residents involved as students will be able to shadow them as well. Conclusion: US medical school graduates who attend community college are more likely to train in family medicine, suggesting community college is an important pathway for increasing the primary care workforce 3. By exposing community college students to our specialty and providing them with early mentorship to make it to medical school, we can increase the number of healthcare professionals choosing family medicine. This will contribute to a much-needed diversified workforce, and shape leaders who will return to their communities to address the health care inequities they face.