

ASSESSMENT OF A RESEARCH-BASED HEALTH ACTIVISM CURRICULUM FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

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MONTEFIORE

Background

- Few opportunities exist in medical education to teach physicians the research and advocacy skills necessary to inform and advocate for socially equitable health policy.
- Research-Based Health Activism (RBHA) describes a growing sector of the medical and public health worlds where the classic skills of clinical research and epidemiology are combined with grassroots advocacy to influence health policy, stemming the influence of private and market forces on public and community health.

Purpose

- At Montefiore Medical Center, we designed a curriculum for fourth-year medical students in RBHA.
- Our objective was to assess the course and its impact on students' career goals.

Materials And Methods

- The RBHA curriculum is an intensive, one month course, teaching the major skills of health activism to enable students to design community and advocacy-based research projects.
- The course includes sessions on (1) health policy, (2) physician activists as role models, (3) advocacy strategies, and (4) research methods.
- At the conclusion of the course, students present a research proposal and advocacy plan, and are encouraged to finish these projects at their home institutions.
- Six students completed the course in 2002 and 15 in 2003.
- Students from 2003 completed pre- and post-course surveys using Likert scales assessing course expectations, success at meeting educational objectives, and career goals.
- Main educational objectives included self-assessed ability to generate a research question, design an advocacy plan, and design and present a research proposal.
- Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and McNemar's test.



PROGRAMMING TRACKS

Health Policy and Activism—The History, present and future:
 to view the field: MD: Public Policy • Stephen Cha, MD: Social Epidemiology • Oliver Fain, MD: IG and Universal Healthcare • Bob Goodman, MD: Pharmaceutical Industry and Physicians • Paul Jung, MD, MPH: History of the US Healthcare System • Joseph Ross, MD: How Healthcare is Organized • Barbara Seaman: Women's Health Activism • Peter Selwyn, MD, MPH: Research and Advocacy of the Crisis of AIDS • Neil Shernick, MD: Health Policy of Local, State, and National Levels • Bruce Vladeck, PhD: Medicine and Role of Physicians in the Future

Physician Activists as Role Models:
 Bernard Bell, MD: Physician Change Agents in NYC's East • Nina Bekel, MD, MPH: Using Research to Improve Quality of Care • Emed Duckler, PhD: Substance Abuse, Inequalities, and Health • Eva Melnik, MD: Human Rights Clinic • Victor Sidel, MD: Race, Terrorism, and Public Health • Sperry Smith, MD, MPH, DPM: Health and Human Rights • Leonard Tepper, PhD: IEC Alert, Organizing Against PHARMA • Sorely Wolfe, MD: Research-based Health Activism

Research Methods—how to produce activist research:
 Robin Ross, MD: Uses of Epidemiology • Alison Corcos, PhD: What is the Research Question • Ruth Wooten, PhD: Research Ethics: Protecting Human Subjects of International Research • Paul Meisner, MSPH: Grant Writing • Joseph Ross, MD: Proposal Writing • Gail Sacajol, MD, MPH: Study Designs • Gail Sacajol, MD, MPH, Alison Corcos, PhD: Acquiring the Data • Nancy Soller, PhD: Using Databases

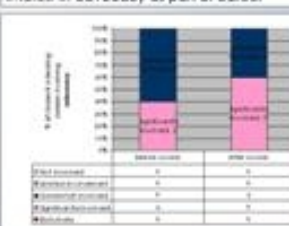
Advocacy—how to create change:
 David Appel, MD: Lobbying • Laura Casso, MPH of City Men's Health Clinic: Golden Building • Stephen Cha, MD: Writing an Advocacy Plan • Mary Kurek, MD and Claudia Calhoun, MPH: Case Worksheet: Advocating for Choice • Sharon Lerner, MPH: Media Relations • Steve Moe of Midwest Academic: Info to Organizing and Strategic Building • Joseph Ross, MD and Stephen Cha, MD: Public Speaking

This course was supported by Public Citizen and the Medicine as a Profession Program of the Open Society Institute. Similar courses exist, supported by Public Citizen and MAP. For details on this and other courses, please go to: www.citizen.org/hrq/activistcourses.

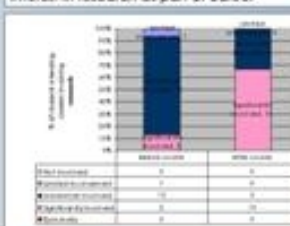
Results

- Students represented all regions of the country, 12 (80%) from outside of the New York City region. Ten (67%) were female, 7 (47%) identified as non-white, and 13 (87%) intended to begin training in a primary care specialty.
- All students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the course met all educational objectives.
- There was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of students intending to incorporate research in their careers ($P < 0.01$). The increase in those intending to incorporate advocacy did not reach statistical significance ($P = 0.51$).
- The sessions identified as most valuable were within the physician activists as role models and advocacy components of the course.
- All students completed a research project addressing social or economic disparities in health care. Three of the six 2002 students finished projects at their medical schools.

Interested in advocacy as part of career



Interested in research as part of career



Conclusions

Our curriculum in RBHA met educational objectives for a diverse group of students. The course significantly increased interest in careers involving research. While there was a nonsignificant increase in interest in careers involving advocacy, many students entered the course with a strong interest in advocacy.