The Lost Art the Physical Exam: Communication and Bedside Teaching in Osteopathic Medical Education
Janet M Lieto, DO, FACOFP, CMD, Associate Professor, Medical Education, TCOM

ABSTRACT

Second year TCOM students eligible to enroll in an honors course chose to complete the Physical Diagnosis, Communication and Bedside Teaching at End-of-Life (EOL) Course. The course was designed to integrate and apply what was learned during TCOM small group sessions including communication, physical exam, clinical integration and clinical reasoning. The experience was designed to stress the importance of self-evaluation of the EDAs including EPA 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Students were expected to relate physical examination findings to a diagnosis and examine the anatomy, physiology, and pathology associated with their diagnostic findings. Students needed to understand the difference of care provided at end of life and propose an appropriate plan. Most of the patients on the Hospice Unit had end stage diseases and many were actively dying. Students utilized their Clinical Communication Skills to relate to patients, families and the interprofessional hospice team. Students prepared a bedside teaching presentation on a topic that peaked their interest. Students confidence levels and attitudes about the experience were surveyed before and after the experience. In addition, a self-reflection narrative was completed.

METHODOLOGY

The course was capped at 6 students with 2 groups of 3 each. Bedside teaching occurred twice with the attending in 3-hour blocks.

RESULTS

Students related examination findings to a diagnosis and explained the anatomy, physiology and pathology associated with their diagnostic findings. They utilized Clinical Communication Skills to relate to patients, families and the interprofessional hospice team. This experience was an application of learned classroom skills.

Each student prepared and executed a bedside teaching presentation in front of the entire group. They chose a topic they experienced and were curious about. This experience allowed them to practice for clinical years by presenting to an attending physician and peers.

Students completed a self-reflective narrative by identifying a problem they faced or how they felt (comfort level) regarding their EDOL experiences. In self-reflecting they identified how they processed and then resolved the problem.

Pre and Post Surveys were completed prior to and after all requirements. The survey was completed in Qualtrics.

Calculations of Percent Change (Post Pct. X 100 + Percent Change)

- Pre
- Post
- Change

Percent Change from Pre to Post Survey In Physical Exam Confidence

- Pre
- Post
- Change

Reflective Narrative Excerpts

"So I am glad to say that this experience has not only taught me about the importance of a good physical exam, it has reminded me of why I wanted to become a doctor in the first place."

"Through this course, I began to see the whole process of death. Having this exposure with patients who are going through their last hours brought a new sense of compassion through my approach as a student doctor."

"During this process, we all deserve to die with dignity and respect. I will take this experience and lessons and apply it to my future patients. However we will continue to challenge me to provide the most compassionate care to my patients at this final stage of their life."

"Through this experience at the hospice, I developed from not understanding the process to beginning to see what death looks like in the final days and the importance of advocating for comfort measures for patients."

"Seeing and talking to family members allowed me not only to see their emotional state but test mine in return."

"Because of this class, I have come to view death not as an unfair ending of life, but instead as the natural, final stage of living."

"Prior to this course, I might have looked at my grandfather’s care and said, "well he’s getting the best treatment possible based on his condition and there’s not a whole lot more I can do," but now I am aware of the importance of asking questions like, "What is your goal of care?" or "Do you have questions or know what to expect throughout this process?" and I see that these sorts of things can make a huge difference."

DISCUSSION

Learning Outcomes that were achieved:

- Students showed increased confidence in identifying physical exam findings found at end of life compared to healthy patient’s while developing a differential diagnosis. (EDAs 1, 2)
- Students became more confident and empathetic in communicating with patients, their families and the interprofessional hospice team. (EDAs 7, 9)
- Students developed and executed an oral presentation. (EDA 7)
- Students self-reflected and raised personal awareness about end-of-life issues and findings. Acknowledging their own discomfort, they developed an action plan for future encounters.