



Multidisciplinary Service Learning: a Medical-Legal Collaboration

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Review

Multidisciplinary Service Learning: a Medical-Legal Collaboration

The context and setting

For the past fifteen years, students at our institution have developed and managed a homeless clinic that provides free medical care to urban underserved individuals. Recently, a collaborative relationship between students at a nearby law school has been forged to develop structured, multidisciplinary legal services to complement the medical care currently offered. Additionally, a joint seminar series focusing on medical-legal issues pertaining to underserved populations was established to enhance medical and law student service-learning and partnership.

Why the idea was necessary

Traditionally, medical students have little formal experience working directly with other professionals, especially those not in the health care field. Urban underserved populations, many with complex life circumstances, benefit from an integrated approach to addressing medical and legal services. Such an approach was strongly supported during an initial needs assessment for the medical-legal services program conducted in December 2005. In a focus group with twelve shelter residents, participants voiced satisfaction with the current medical services offered but reiterated the need for education and services focused on criminal and benefits law. Since many medical students will participate in clinic development and policy decisions regarding urban underserved populations in their future careers, part of medical training should focus on cultivating those skills and facilitating collaboration across disciplines.

What was done

The medical-legal program is based on the service-learning model previously established at the clinic. The joint seminars were attended by medical and law students who volunteer at the clinic and met weekly for eleven weeks. Its curriculum focused on areas where the fields of medicine and law intersect, including foster care, prisoner health, and homeless health policy issues. Seminar speakers are leaders within their fields who expressed interest in establishing mentoring opportunities with participants; course oversight was provided by both medical and law school faculty. Under the guidance of supervising attorneys from

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3 non-profit organizations and a private law firm, law students provide weekly on-site legal advice aimed at
4 navigating legal resources in the community, working in close proximity to the already-established medical
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7 clinic.
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10 11 **Evaluation of the results or impact**

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13 Eleven law students and thirteen medical students enrolled in the seminar series. Course satisfaction data
14 was gathered through a written evaluation at the end of the course completed by 20 participants (response
15 rate 83%). On a 5-point scale ranging from “excellent” (5) to “poor” (1), the overall seminar topics
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17 averaged a score of 4.72. Students were also asked on a 5-point scale to “strongly agree” (5) or “strongly
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19 disagree” (1) whether the course exposed students to role models working with the underserved; the
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21 average score was 4.95.
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27 The framework of a student-run clinic augmented by a joint seminar series is a very unique medical and
28 legal collaboration. Private, public, and academic spheres were integrated to provide a multidisciplinary
29 service model for underserved clients. Furthermore, students are creating opportunities to work within a
30 multidisciplinary and interprofessional team early in their training, so that as future professionals, they will
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32 have access to an extended network of peers and mentors.
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