

Telemedicine in Physician Assistant Education: A Partnership with Community Agency

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Abstract : A core challenge of physician assistant education is preparing professionals for lifelong learning. While this conventionally has encompassed scientific advances, students must also embrace new care delivery models and technologies. Telemedicine, the provision of care via two-way audio and video, is an example of a technological advance reforming health care. During a three-semester sequence of Hospital Community Experiences, physician assistant students were assigned experiences with Answer Health on Demand, a telemedicine collaborative. Preceding the experiences, the agency lectured on the application of telemedicine. Students were then introduced to the technology and partnered with a provider. Prior to observing the patient-provider interaction, patient consent was obtained. Afterwards, students completed a reflection paper on lessons learned and the potential impact of telemedicine on their careers. Thematic analysis was completed on the students' reflection papers (n=13). Preceding the lecture and experience, over 75% of students (10/13) were unaware of telemedicine. Several stated they were 'skeptical' about the effectiveness of 'impersonal' health care appointments. After the experience, all students remarked that telemedicine will play a large role in the future of healthcare and will provide benefits by improving access in rural areas, decreasing wait time, and saving cost. More importantly, 30% of students (4/13) commented that telemedicine is a technology they can see themselves using in their future practice. Initial results indicate that collaborative interaction between students and telemedicine providers enhanced student learning and exposed students to technological advances in the delivery of care. Further, results indicate that students perceived telemedicine more favorably as a viable delivery method after the experience.

Keywords : collaboration, physician assistant education, teaching innovative health care delivery method, telemedicine

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