Objective: To develop a health care medical student Navigator Program for older adults to promote undergraduate medical education in geriatrics.

Description: The Navigator Program is a medical student geriatric curricular initiative based around older persons’ ambulatory health care encounters. The dual goals are to: (1) increase patients’ understanding of their outpatient care; and, (2) provide medical student training in the geriatric competencies of medication reconciliation and effective communication with medically complex older patients.

The program pairs a trained MS1 or MS2 (the Student Navigator [SN]) with an older patient whom the student “navigates” through an ambulatory clinic visit. The SN accompanies the patient into the exam room and using a standardized encounter form takes notes on vital signs, test results, assessments, instructions, and medication changes. Afterwards, the SN summarizes this information with the patient and caregiver, and provides copies of the encounter form and a reconciled med list.

New SNs are trained jointly by geriatrician faculty advisors (FAs) and experienced SNs using a “Train-the-Trainers” model. The SN leader, an MS2 who oversees new SN training, meets weekly with FAs for mentoring and leadership development. Current SNs train new SNs, who are given a Student Navigator Resource Handbook that includes articles on communication with older persons and geriatric prescribing.

Evaluation: Evaluation of the program includes surveys of SNs (confidence and skills), patients (comfort with SN and understanding of their doctor’s advice), and clinic providers (value to their patients). To date, 10 SNs have worked with 21 patients. Preliminary evaluation data indicate that 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the program increased their confidence in working with older patients and that they learned new skills for working with older patients. Similarly, 100% of patients said they felt comfortable with the SN and 80% said they were more able to follow their doctor’s recommendations.

We conclude that the Navigator Program is beneficial to educating medical students about geriatric issues. We plan to expand the program to more sites as well as provide a more longitudinal experience by allowing students to follow a patient across multiple clinical interactions.

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