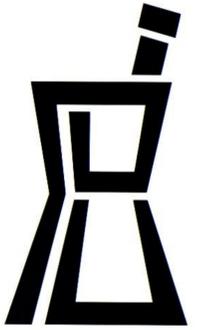


Caring for the Underserved: A Pharmacy Practice Experience at a Federally Qualified Health Center

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Introduction

Currently, 46 million people in this country have no health insurance and the percentage of uninsured continues to rise with the current economic downturn. Many individuals still have little or no access to healthcare while others lack quality healthcare. In the face of this serious problem, the uninsured may forgo healthcare services due to access issues, and in the end, utilize more costly medical services due to untreated diseases.

Community Partnership

Tippecanoe Community Health Clinic (now Riggs Community Health Center) is the only non-profit Federally Qualified Health Center located in the rural Greater Lafayette, Indiana area. This clinic serves as a safety net for medically underserved patients, special populations, and the uninsured. Approximately 70% of the patients served have incomes below the 100% federal poverty level, more than 50% receive Medicaid or other government assistance, and 40% are uninsured.

Coordinated primary healthcare services are provided to all age groups. Specialized services include pharmacotherapy referral, nutrition counseling, smoking cessation, telephone triage, medication assistance, health referral, and homeless outreach.



Learning Objectives

The goal of this 8-week service-learning course is to prepare pharmacy students to address specific needs of the underserved patients through providing direct patient care for a diverse population.

1. Describe the philosophy of clinical pharmacy practice, emphasizing its application to caring for the underserved patients.
2. Identify the role of pharmacists in addressing health disparities.
3. Obtain, organize, and assess patients' medication profiles for potential medication-related problems.
4. Integrate information to design, recommend, implement, monitor and evaluate patient specific pharmacotherapeutic regimens to prevent or resolve medication-related problems in underserved populations.
5. Assess patient medication adherence and develop strategies for improving adherence in underserved patients.
6. Develop a level of comfort in interacting with other healthcare providers and an appreciation of the roles of the various members of the healthcare team.
7. Advise physicians and other healthcare professionals on appropriate drug therapy based on clinical efficacy, safety, availability, ease of administration and cost-effective prescribing.
8. Demonstrate effective communication skills with underserved patients.
9. Demonstrate effective communication skills with healthcare professionals.
10. Respond to information requests through appropriate drug literature retrieval, evaluation, interpretation and clinical application.
11. Demonstrate medication history taking skills, medication reconciliation skills, and physical assessment skills.
12. List 3 challenges and rewards of caring for the underserved population.

Service-Learning Activities

- **Pharmacotherapy Referral Program**
 - Scheduled pharmacy appointments to assist patients with medication-related issues and chronic disease management
 - Students are accountable for selected patients' medication therapies and outcomes
 - Provide comprehensive clinical services: patient education, physical assessment, initiation, modification, monitoring, and evaluation of drug therapies; develop medication-related policies and programs (under supervision of a clinical faculty)
- **Interdisciplinary healthcare team integration**
 - Complete chart reviews and provide proactive recommendations to ensure optimal use of medications integrating principles of evidence-based medicine
 - Work side-by-side and collaborate with a primary care provider and nursing staff to recommend appropriate patient-specific drug therapy (two 1/2 days per week)
- **Patient Empathy Modeling Exercises¹**
 - Sensitize pharmacy students to the issues faced by the underserved and enhance students' humanistic attitudes in caring for underserved patients
 - Students "live the life" of an underserved patient with multiple chronic diseases while coping with an economic, cultural, or communication barrier for 10 days
- **Visit(s) to community shelter**
- **Formal in-service presentation**
- **Group patient education**



Application of Caring for the Underserved Curriculum Framework

Evidence Base for Practice

- Monthly journal club presentation
- Monthly therapeutic discussion
- Tri-weekly patient case discussions
- Drug information requests

Clinical Preventative Services – Health Promotion

- Clinical services – disease management
- Direct patient counseling
- Chemoprevention
- Immunization



Health System and Health Policy

- Interdisciplinary healthcare team integration
- Clinical health service and discussions on public health responsibilities
- Problem solving on clinical service coverage and financial reimbursement
- Utilize 340B program and other resources to provide affordable medications
- Discuss roles of pharmacists and other healthcare providers in underserved settings

Community Aspects of Practice

- Assess cultural influences on providing and receiving healthcare
- Assess community and individual needs and identify methods for intervention
- Deliver culturally competent healthcare
- Facilitate resources available for underserved patients
- Evidence-based recommendations for community preventative service

Assessments

- Summative and formative evaluation
- Patient case discussions assess students' clinical management, judgment, and knowledge
- Determine evidence of clinical and cultural competence in delivering patient-centered care through patients' feedback, comprehension and response
- End-of-rotation reflection assignment
- Final course evaluation

Learning Themes Expressed in Student Reflections²

1. Rewards of caring for the underserved

"Knowing how difficult it is for an underserved patient to get control over their disease states due to all the barriers, and being able to help them get that control, is honestly the best feeling I've ever felt..."

2. Growth in the provision of care for diverse populations

"You constantly have to change your language to account for educational backgrounds, cultural differences, or other circumstances... Everyone is different, and in order to reach them, you don't have to change your message, but change your delivery."

3. Barriers and challenges of the underserved

"These patients are dealing with a lot of issues besides their health, for example, how they are going to pay the bills and feed their children. It takes compassion on the part of the pharmacist and knowledge of resources available to help these patients, which will in turn, help them to take time for their own healthcare."

4. Changes in perception of the underserved

"I had some struggles at the beginning of the rotation when I walked into a consultation room and the patient had body odor, dirty clothes, and poor hygiene. However, by the end of the rotation it seemed like I did not notice these things anymore. Instead of looking at the outward appearance, I started seeing the patient as somebody who needed my compassion and professional advice."

"I think the most important thing I take away from this rotation is sensitivity for these people. Many of them are doing the best they can with life, searching for jobs and trying to care for family. These are not dirty, ugly, lazy, or useless people taking advantage of the system."

5. Awareness of poverty and homelessness

"I never realized how little money people could live on. I had no idea that Lafayette actually had homeless people. Needless to say, I have become more appreciative of the life that I live. I appreciate the fact that I still have my family because there are people that aren't as fortunate. I appreciate my bed and my pillows and my food more than I ever have before."

Conclusions

- To strengthen the existing public health system, service-learning course at underserved communities are essential to prepare students to bridge the greatest disparity gap in healthcare
- Genuine concern and sensitivity to care for the underserved is required for future pharmacists in alleviating health disparities
- Successful student learning requires consistent supervision and strong mentoring from preceptors during clinical rotation
- Sufficient patient encounter time is crucial for students to personally interact and build a trusting relationship with their patients, which encompass listening, understanding, and appreciating patients' individual backgrounds
- Preceptor needs to foster the pharmacist-patient relationship to help students recognize and acknowledge the uniqueness and humanity of each patient

References

1. Impact of *Patient Empathy Modeling* on pharmacy students caring for the underserved. *Am J Pharm Educ* 2008;72(2):Article 40.
2. Student perception of the underserved at a Federally Qualified Health Center. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning* 2010; in press.