



Abstract Title: Enhancing undergraduate medical education with community engaged learning experiences: Results of a two-year evaluation of a service learning program

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Introduction/Background

Although Canadian Medical Schools have been engaged in community experiential learning for decades, the inclusion of service learning as accreditation standard 6.6 (Committee on Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools, 2015) has helped to formalize meaningful community engagement in undergraduate medical education (UGME).

Purpose

The new co-curricular Service Learning Program in the Faculty of Medicine, requires students to participate in preparations (online modules and in-person orientation and mid-point check in gathering) and written critical reflections in addition to the minimum of 20 hours participating in a service learning experiences. The experience also includes contributing to a project based on community identified priorities.

Approach or Action

The comprehensive process and outcome program evaluation includes descriptive (e.g., program design, development, delivery, resources; Teaching, learning and assessment), and quantitative and qualitative measures (e.g., number of participants, student and community pre-post surveys, qualitative themes from student critical reflection, student focus group, community partner post-interview and open-ended questions from the surveys).

Outcomes

Evaluation results demonstrate that participants (both students and community partners) felt that being involved with the program was a positive experience. Many of the students commented on the essential link that this program provided to classroom learned concepts, like the social determinants of health. This connection was further enhanced through the use of critical reflection assignments which required them to link their experiences back to classroom learned concepts, reflect upon the resources available in community and how they see themselves applying these lessons of new lens of understanding in their future practice. Participants felt that the program was easy to be involved with, efficiently run and noted the supportive administration. Program registration has nearly doubled for the 2017-18 academic year. Communication issues, managing the time commitment in addition to academic requirements, and project outcome expectations were the most commonly noted challenges.

Conclusions

The Service Learning Program has served to enhance the potential of the medical learner to learn through community contribution based on meaningful and engaged community experiences. These experiences are further enhanced using reflective practices and feedback that serve to link and enrich classroom and community-based learning with clear implications of reciprocal benefits for the community and the students. Canadian Medical schools continue to seek new ways of enhancing community-based learning experiences and partnerships and the Service Learning Program has demonstrated a clear potential to enhance and sustain meaningful partnerships with community through a direct indication of being a socially accountable institution.

References

Committee on Accreditation of Canadian Medical Schools. (2015). CACMS Standards and Elements Standards for Accreditation of Medical Education Programs Leading to the M.D. Degree. Accessed online on February 14, 2018: <https://www.afmc.ca/pdf/CACMS_Standards_and_Elements_June_2014_Effective_July12015.pdf>

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