

O'LEARY, KEVIN

November 13, 2007

Richard M. Green, MD
Associate Professor of Medicine
Director, Medical Student Summer Research
and Research Thesis Programs

Dear Dr. Green,
Subject: Medical Student Summer Research Program (MSSRP) and Research Thesis
Program (RTP)

I am writing this letter to express my interest in becoming a mentor in the MSSP. Four years ago, I helped launch the hospitalist program at Northwestern Memorial Hospital (NMH). The privilege to lead this new group of physicians also provided the opportunity to participate in quality improvement and clinical research. My past and current experiences as a clinician, teacher, and leader at our institution, have revealed to me the tremendous impact of communication failures that occur between health care professionals. Although interested in all aspects of healthcare quality and patient safety, I am especially interested in this critical issue; studying and improving communication and collaboration between health care professionals.

Last summer, two medical students worked with me as research assistants on a project exploring this issue. The medical students interviewed hospitalized patients, nurses, and their physicians on general medical services. We found that, although 90% of patients expected that their physician and nurse communicate on a daily basis, only 60% of physicians reported communicating with patients' nurses and only 50% of nurses reported communicating with patients' physicians. Importantly, lack of communication between providers appears to predict lack of agreement on the plan of care. We are now using information collected in the first phase of this project to redesign our model of care delivery and improve collaboration between health care professionals. To assess the impact of our interventions, we plan to repeat the patient, nurse, and physician interviews in June 2008.

I was thrilled to see how much the medical students enjoyed working on this project. After pilot interviews, the students provided essential input in revising questions. Later, they provided key insights in interpreting data. One of the medical students plans to present a portion of study at the annual American College of Physicians meeting next spring. I hope that you will agree that this is wonderful opportunity for three medical students to learn about research and have an impact on the quality of hospitalized patients' care.

Sincerely,

Kevin J. O'Leary, MD

Medical Student Summer Research Program (MSSRP) and Research Thesis Program (RTP)

Mentor Information:

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Research description:

a) General research description

Patients', Nurses' and Physicians' Understanding of the Plan of Care

Communication between physicians and nurses and between these clinical providers and their patients is critically important to provide safe and effective care. Poor communication is a major contributor to adverse events in hospitals. In June 2007, we conducted interviews of hospitalized general medical patients, their nurses and their physicians. The primary goal of the first phase of this study was to characterize health care provider communication patterns and identify barriers to collaboration. We found that, although 90% of patients expected that their physician and nurse communicate on a daily basis, only 60% of physicians reported communicating with patients' nurses and only 50% of nurses reported communicating with patients' physicians. Importantly, lack of communication appeared to predict lack of agreement on the plan of care. Further analysis of interview data is ongoing and will help identify barriers to communication and teamwork on general medicine units. In phase 2 of this study, we will convene an interdisciplinary team to collaborate on methods for improving communication and collaboration. Interventions may include geographic localization of physician teams, interdisciplinary rounds using structured daily goals of care, and revisions to telecommunication systems. The interventions are not mutually exclusive and will be implemented January through April 2008. Two medical students conducted the baseline interviews in June 2007. We plan to repeat similar interviews in June 2008 to assess the benefit of the initiatives implemented in phase 2.

A secondary goal for phase 2 of this study is to assess physician communication skills with hospitalized patients using the Communication Assessment Tool (CAT) developed by Makoul et al.¹ Our hypothesis is that higher physician communication scores will be associated with patients having a more complete understanding of their plan of care. Embarking on this secondary goal would create the opportunity for a third medical student to participate on the project.

b) Description of potential MSSRP student project

The two medical students who participated in the baseline interviews in June 2007 were critical to the projects success. The students thoroughly enjoyed the project and provided key input in interview design and data interpretation. One of the medical student plans to submit the work as an abstract to the annual American College of Physicians meeting.

We are recommending three medical students participate on this project for the summer of 2008. The project gives preclinical medical students a unique opportunity to get a glimpse into clinical care delivery and perform research designed to evaluate and improved the complex systems in which we deliver care.

2) Cover letter explaining the reasons for interest in becoming a mentor is attached.

3) Current Biosketch

Kevin O'Leary helped launch the Hospitalist program at Northwestern Memorial Hospital (NMH) in 2003. This program has enjoyed tremendous success, growing from 3 hospitalists in 2003 to now 43 hospitalists making up 34 FTEs. He has continued to stay active in education and quality improvement. He oversees the teaching service at NMH and coordinates firm conference, a popular weekly case-based conference for internal medicine students, residents, and attendings. He chairs the Department of Medicine Quality Management Committee and was recently selected as the medical school competency leader for Systems Awareness and Team-Based Care. He has a special interest in communication and teamwork as it relates to patient safety.

4) Trainees over the past 5 years:

- Raman Khanna – internal medicine resident. Raman characterized predictors of discharge summary delay during a resident research block during the summer of 2007.
- Kelly Wachsberg – internal medicine resident. Kelley surveyed overweight and obese hospitalized patients on how their weight affected their hospital experience and their interest in weight loss interventions.
- Katherine Hahn – medical student. Kathy conducted the baseline interviews for the first phase of this project in the summer of 2007. She has submitted a portion of the project as an abstract to be considered for presentation at the American College of Physicians Annual Meeting.
- Jiyeon Jeon – medical student. Jiyeon also conducted baseline interviews for the first phase of this project in the summer of 2007.

Research area:
Clinical Science

References:

1. Makoul G, Krupat E, Chang CH. Measuring patient views of physician communication skills: development and testing of the Communication Assessment Tool. *Patient Educ Couns.* Aug 2007;67(3):333-342.