

June 2009

Dear Entering Student:

Welcome to Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine! We would like to tell you a bit about Patient Perspectives, a student-operated program that attempts to help first year medical students preserve their idealism and humanism as they navigate the basic science years.

More than 25 years ago, two medical students were disturbed by certain unhealthy attitudes they saw developing in themselves and in their classmates at Northwestern. They believed that the majority entered medical school as idealistic, enthusiastic and humanistic people, but emerged at the end of two years more disillusioned and cynical than when they started. These students felt a major need for early exposure to the normal human fears and to the ordinary human confusion that people experience when faced with illness. They started the Patient Perspectives Program to help remedy this situation.

Since then, the medical school has implemented a revised curriculum, a major portion of which is a course called Patient, Physician & Society. The combination of course work in Patient, Physician & Society and experiences in Patient Perspectives will reinforce your awareness of the patient as a human being. As second year students, we feel this is essential because the basic science courses emphasize breaking down the human body into functional units and systems, which are more easily understood by the scientific method. It's easy to lose sight of the patient if you focus only on form and function, so we hope you consider Patient Perspectives as a way to complement your education.

Here's how Patient Perspectives works: In either the fall or spring quarters you will meet independently with hospitalized individuals to talk about non-technical problems and the emotional reactions that accompany their illnesses. You will be able to explore the patient's overall experience both outside and within the hospital. Additionally, you will meet in a group with second-year program coordinators once a week. These sessions will be devoted to:

1. understanding the impact of illness and hospitalization on an individual and his/her family & friends
2. sorting out and dealing with reactions to what you and fellow students have heard
3. understanding the hospital system and looking for ways in which the student can assist the patient and family in solving their problems
4. improving communication skills

In this process, we will share our experiences, our failures and our successes, and provide support for each other. A faculty or hospital staff member will sit in on approximately one session per month and will serve as a valuable resource for us.

We would like to inform you that this program will not always be easy on you. There may be times when feelings will be dredged up that you may not like or want to express to others. There may be times when you will resent "losing" two to four hours a week. We believe that the long- and short-term benefits of this program outweigh these problems. However, the investment that you will make will not be small; please consider this when you decide to participate.

There are several excellent sites for this year's program: Children's Memorial Hospital, Northwestern Memorial Hospital (NMH), the Hospice at NMH, Psychiatry at NMH, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, and the Veterans Administration Westside Medical Center. A brief description of the unique features of each program is given below:

Children's Memorial Hospital

Children's Memorial Hospital (CMH) is devoted entirely to pediatrics, a unique discipline in medicine as doctors are required to interact with worried parents, caregivers and family members, in addition to taking care of the children. In CMH's Patient Perspectives, participants will have the opportunity to better understand the dynamics of pediatric disease by speaking with parents and spending time with the children. Students will also learn how kids and their families cope with the unique problems facing hospitalized children. During the program, participants will take the (free) shuttle to CMH where they will meet with patients, parents, and/or caregivers. Following their encounters, the group will discuss what they have learned and will also meet with hospital staff to discuss various special services offered at CMH for both patients and their families. Participants in the CMH program will meet eight times either in the fall or the spring.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

NMH is a large, tertiary-care facility adjacent to the medical school. Participants in the NMH Patient's Perspectives program rotate through several of the units, visiting a different patient each week. This exposes them to a wide variety of patients with different stories to share. Weekly meetings include sharing of personal interchanges with patients and insights into the process of communicating with patients on a human level. Guest speakers will be featured at some weekly meetings, and will share their personal viewpoints of the patient, the hospital, and/or the practice of medicine. Previous speakers have included those in social services, pastoral services, and risk management.

Palliative Care and Oncology at Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Palliative care is care directed at patient symptoms and comfort. It involves patients undergoing treatment for cancer and other illnesses, as well as patients in Hospice, which focuses mainly on quality of life during the final six months of life expectancy. Each week, students will meet with a new patient (and any family members who are present). This will be quite a unique experience, as you will discuss difficult issues of disease,

death, and coping, which you usually would not be exposed to until later in your medical career.

Because of the nature of this site, we are especially looking for students who are highly committed to the program. There will be an initial orientation session so that students will learn how to approach and become comfortable talking with terminally ill patients. Weekly discussions with the group will allow you to share your experiences and emotions. Although at times this program may be difficult emotionally, we believe that the time spent with these patients will be extremely rewarding.

Psychiatry at Northwestern Memorial Hospital

The Psychiatry program is a new addition to the Patient Perspectives list of opportunities. The Department of Psychiatry, located in the Olson building adjacent to NMH, is very excited to join this program and we are equally excited about the new opportunity. The services that the Institute of Psychiatry provides include emergency and crisis intervention, psychopharmacology, chemical dependence programs, and outpatient and inpatient care for adults. Communicating with psychiatric patients requires a unique subset of interpersonal skills, which will be addressed in the early weeks of the program.

Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago

RIC is a well established NU-affiliated teaching hospital whose goal is to return the disabled person to the highest level of self care and economic independence within the limits of his/her disability. Students participating in programs at the RIC will have the unique opportunity to deal with chronically ill and disabled patients on a more personal level -- each student will meet with one patient for several weeks until the patient is discharged, at which time the student will be assigned a new patient.

Physicians in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation and disabled patients will share with the students their personal experiences in small discussions. Additionally, students in the adult program will have the opportunity to experience a small glimpse of what it is like to be physically handicapped during the program's wheelchair event. Furthermore, the student will be given the option to attend team conferences addressing the patient's progress and health/psychological status, as well as the option to attend some therapy sessions (e.g. Physical, Occupational, etc.).

The children's program at RIC provides the same objectives and opportunities as the adult program except that its focus is on disabled children. The student will work individually with one or more patients throughout the quarter but will also have the opportunity to interact with other children on the Pediatric floor. In order to learn about the child's experiences of being "unlike" other children, unable to run and play, and unable to live at home for long periods of time, the student will be challenged to find a creative way of communicating with his/her patient (some of the most enlightening conversations have been found in the midst of a boisterous game or imaginative project). Interaction with the child's family, learning about their readjustments and methods of

coping will provide an additional perspective on the lifestyle of the chronically ill or handicapped child. The size of the Pediatric Ward limits this program to ten students per quarter.

Veterans Administration Westside Medical Center

The VA is an advanced tertiary care facility that serves the multiple health care needs of Chicago-area veterans. The patients are predominantly male, of varying socioeconomic status, and frequently suffer from recurrent or chronic illnesses. Many have considerable experience with institutionalization and possess insights about skills towards coping with it. Many can also share fascinating historical perspectives gained through serving and fighting in wars ranging from World War II to the current war in Iraq. Through their unique experiences with the trauma of war and their current sickness, many have emotionally charged stories that can sometimes be difficult to handle, and which at other times can uplift your spirits.

Participating students have the opportunity to develop ongoing relationships with specific patients, or to see several different patients. The program is extremely flexible in structure and times available for visits. Regular meetings will be held with second-year coordinators to share experiences and discuss related issues and problems.

Well, there you have it. Please take some time this summer to think about the site and time of year you would prefer. We will be providing more information about Patient Perspectives during Orientation Week, and ask that you be prepared to sign up for your program of interest at the Activities Fair.

Enjoy the rest of your summer. We look forward to meeting you!

Abigail Buoy, Gloria Lan, Richard Leiter, and Samantha Luk,

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