

Evaluating a Novel Curriculum for Teaching Communication Skills at the Bedside

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Abstract

- We developed a novel curriculum to **model** -- and allow students to **practice** -- important communication skills with **real** patients, many of whom are seriously ill.
- This study was designed to:
 - Assess the effectiveness of the new curriculum in teaching communication skills at the bedside
 - Evaluate student preferences regarding communication skills training
 - Measure students' self-assessments of their increased confidence and proficiency in communication skills as a result of the curriculum

Background & Purpose

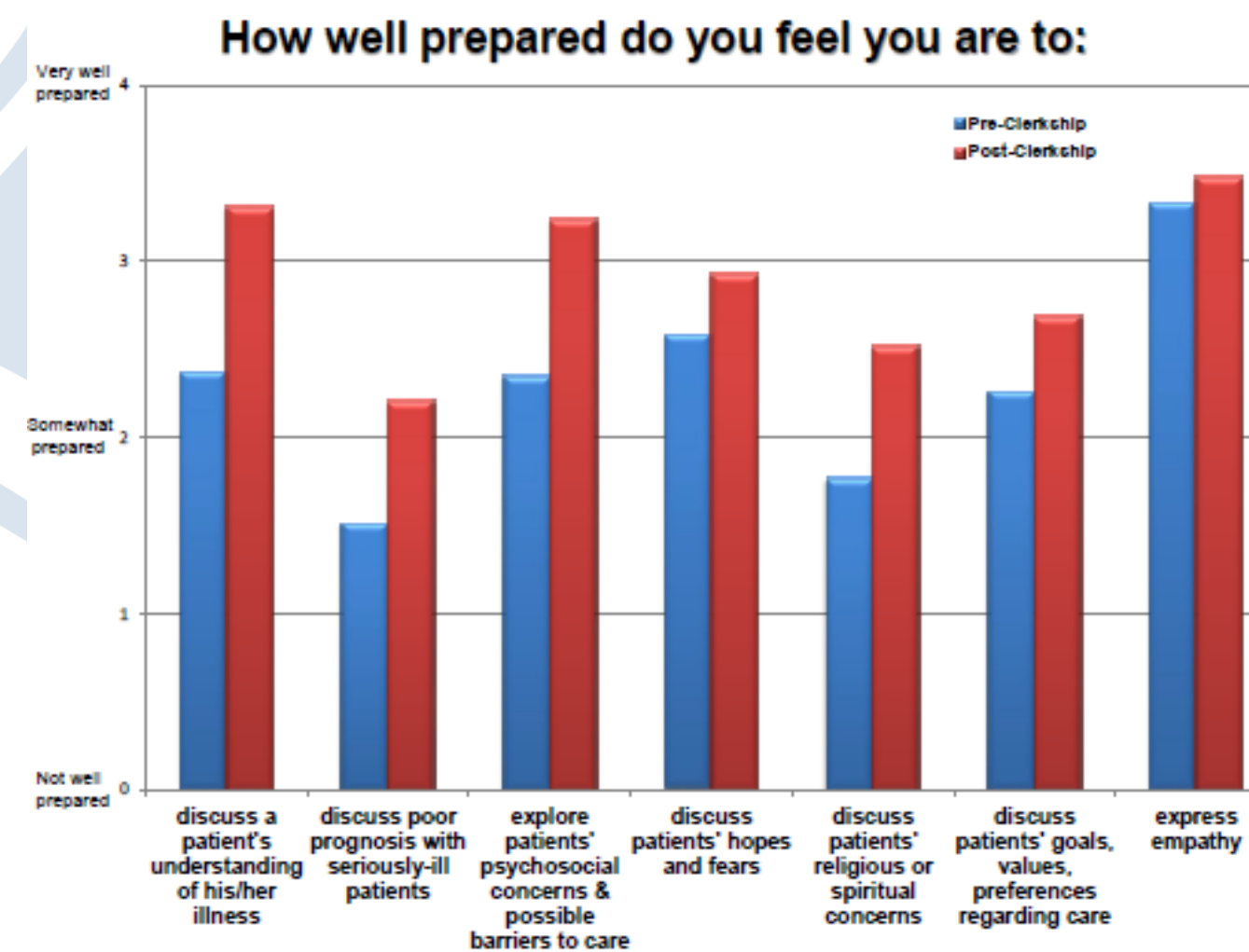
- Effective communication enables physicians to:
 - Provide healthcare better aligned with patients' values and priorities
 - Identify unmet psychological, social, or spiritual needs that might interfere with optimal care
 - Enhance therapeutic partnerships with patients
- Students report that they feel unprepared to have conversations with seriously-ill patients about their illnesses.
- Students report feeling uncomfortable about delving into "deeper" conversations with patients about their needs, which may lead them to overlook unmet psychological, social, or spiritual needs that can interfere with optimal care.
- Students report dissatisfaction with role playing, didactic sessions, and/or the use of standardized patients to teach these valuable communication skills.

Methods

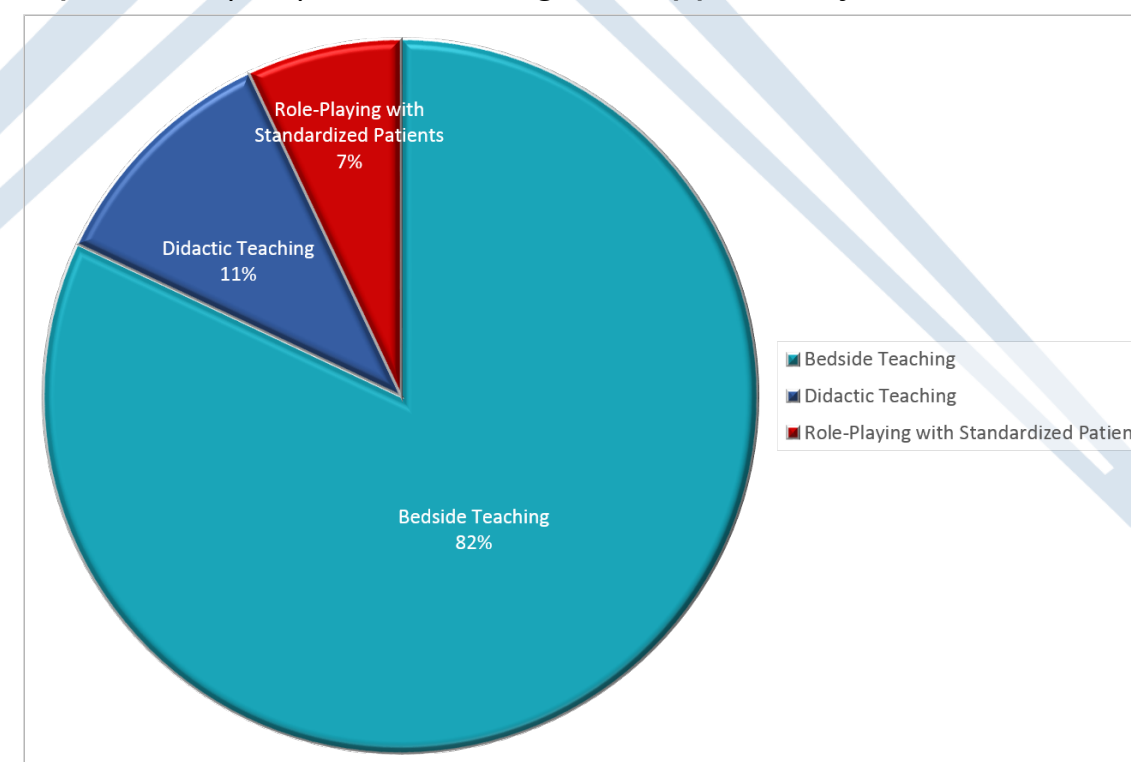
- We implemented a novel curriculum within the Internal Medicine Clerkship utilizing **bedside teaching/role-modeling, directly-observed student-patient encounters, and formative feedback** to enhance students' skills and confidence in communicating with seriously-ill patients.
- We will evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of this curriculum by:
 - Administering Pre- and Post-Clerkship Surveys to assess students' perceptions regarding their training and **confidence** in communicating with seriously-ill patients before and after the intervention
 - Using student focus groups to further refine the surveys and to gain qualitative data about the value of the curriculum

Preliminary Results

- Based on our preliminary data (n = 43 Pre-Clerkship, n = 29 Post-Clerkship), the **most promising improvements were seen in students' confidence:**
 - **discussing patients' understanding of illness** (0.94 point average improvement on a 4 point scale Pre- vs. Post-Clerkship)
 - **exploring psychosocial concerns/barriers to care** (0.89 point improvement)
 - **discussing religious/spiritual issues** (0.75 point improvement)
 - **discussing poor prognosis with seriously-ill patients** (0.7 point improvement)



- Based on our preliminary data, **most students (82%) prefer bedside teaching of communication skills**, rather than didactics (11%) or role-playing with standardized patients (7%), after having this opportunity.



Discussion & Future Directions

- Thus far, we have shown this curriculum to be:
 - Well-received by students and faculty
 - Effective in enhancing students' self-confidence and perceived self-efficacy in communication skills
 - Preferred by students as a means of teaching these important communication skills.
- Limitations include:
 - Students' potential inability to accurately assess their own communication skills
 - Post-Clerkship surveys evaluated the IM Clerkship as a whole, not just this new curriculum
- We will continue gathering survey data and refining the surveys further. We will also hold student focus groups to gain further insight into students' perceptions of the curriculum and to address any potential areas for improvement.
- As a next phase, we hope to more objectively measure student communication skills (pre- and post-intervention), for example, through OSCEs (will require additional support).

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