INTRODUCTION

In the health care field, communication is an important aspect of providing high quality care for patients, thus being able to speak the same language as our patients or having appropriate medical interpreters is essential. Even more pertinent is the fact that studies have shown that language barriers between patients and health providers can lead to reduced quality of care, compliance, and trust among patients. As a result, patients with limited English proficiency (LEP) can be at risk for medical errors and worse health outcomes compared to the English-speaking population. Of the LEP population, the vast majority in the U.S. are Spanish speaking, and the leading state with 27% of LEP residents is California (Chhandasi Pandya, 2001). Studies have also found that language barriers are associated with lower patient comprehension and satisfaction of the care they are receiving (Fernandez A, 2009). For providers, language barriers can invoke dread, communication frustration, perception of wasted time, mislabeling of patients as non-compliant, a sense of disconnect, all of which can lead to increased difficulty in providing high quality care (Karlner LS, 2004). Patients want health providers that speak their language well enough to supply excellent care and who will be able to better understand and listen to their needs.

In California, the need for Spanish speaking health providers will continue to increase as the Latino, Spanish speaking population continues to grow every year. Further, the gap will continue to grow if changes are not implemented to address this disparity. Changes that are needed include increasing the number of Spanish speaking health professional students being accepted, implementation of medical Spanish training for health professionals, and increased accessibility to trained medical interpreters. Medical schools in areas that serve a large Spanish speaking population need to really consider providing medical Spanish training for their students, to ensure they are equipped with all the tools they will need to provide the best quality care they can.

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PROJECT GOALS

Goal #1: To develop a hybrid medical Spanish course for health professional students that will provide tools and resources to strengthen their Spanish medical vocabulary, including greetings, history, physical exam and everyday speech with the ultimate goal to provide more culturally-oriented care to our Spanish speaking community.

Goal #2: To offer additional opportunities for students to practice Medical Spanish among peers and in the community.

METHODS

Course Design:
- 10 weeks (2 hr class, once a week)- Elective Credit Course (optional)
- Participants: Medical and Nursing students
- Level(s): Beginner to Fluent

Components of the Course:
- In person sessions - lecture and simulations/role playing
- Practice activities (in-class & outside)
- Additional resources: Medical Spanish Pocket Card Set

RESULTS

- Over 90% of students indicated a Medical Spanish course would be valuable for their training
- Students indicated interest in having a course that incorporates online modules, in-class sessions, more practice opportunities, on-going/follow-up course(s)
- Challenges included scheduling conflicts with already impacted medical and nursing school curricula, wide range of fluency among students in the course, and not enough opportunities to practice beyond the elective course.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS...

The design, development and implementation of the hybrid medical Spanish course in an on-going project that will continue beyond the National Medical Fellowship (NMF) Community Service Learning Project. However, the support from NMF has provided a foundation for the course and with the interest of Medical Spanish training/tools among students, efforts will continue to establish formal training that is incorporated into the curriculum. Below are some of the next steps for this project:
- Implement another 10-week elective course in the Fall of 2017 and work towards offering the course at least 1-2 times per year
- Record the lectures/lessons to make them available online for students
- Provide access to medical Spanish tools/resources developed for the course (i.e. Medical Spanish pocket cards)
- Work with partners like LMSA to offer opportunities to practice medical Spanish in social settings, clinical sites and community sites
- Identify potential funding sources to establish a formal medical Spanish training program for health professional students at UC Davis School of Medicine and Nursing School or opportunities to incorporate Medical Spanish training into the curriculum.

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