

Interprofessional Student Hotspotting Learning Collaborative

This project is designed to be an educational exercise for students interested in learning about the experiences of high-utilizing patients and the systemic barriers that cause repeated hospital admissions. In shadowing one patient with high healthcare utilization, students are engaging in the simplest form of “hotspotting.” Through spending time one on one with a patient with multiple chronic conditions in the hospital, at outpatient appointments, in the patient’s homes, and in the community, students will be able to gain a more complete sense of the his or her experience: how a social situation can affect the ability to manage one’s health and well-being.

The bulk of the learning will come from observing the patient’s interaction with the healthcare system. The educational value in the project lies in gaining an understanding of a patient’s unique experience; students are not taking action to intervene in a patient’s care. In order to maximize learning, we recommend that this be a self-directed project for students. While faculty can act as a sounding board for students to discuss their experiences and observations, faculty does not need to provide direct instruction for this project since the primary goal is to directly observe and provide accompaniment to patients.

Frequently Asked Questions for Faculty

Q: Why are we asking students to visit patients at home?

A: Interacting with patients outside the hospital setting allows students to gain a more complete understanding of the social situations that can lead to high utilization. By meeting patients in their own homes and communities, students can observe first-hand how various aspects of patients’ lives affect their health and act as barriers to care. Meeting patients on their own “turf” also subverts the hierarchy that can exist between providers and patients in healthcare settings. Interacting with patients in their own environments shifts the power dynamic, allowing patients to feel more comfortable sharing details about their lives that will allow students to better understand how patients experience the healthcare system.

Q: What are the safety concerns for students who embark on this project?

A: We recommend that students first engage with patients in the hospital setting to develop a relationship before meeting with patients at their homes. Students should not visit a patient’s home by themselves, should always let others know where they will be, and should never stay

in an area where they feel unsafe. When in the community, students should always know where they are going and remain alert and aware of their surroundings. If the patient's home is not in a safe location, students should arrange to meet the patient in another location in the community.

Q: Does this project require IRB approval?

A: No, this exercise is intended to be an educational experience for the students involved and a quality improvement intervention for patients. It is not a research project, and students do not need to go through the process of obtaining IRB approval in order to work with patients in this capacity. No research product will be produced through this exercise.

Q: What are the legal issues students should consider?

A: Students should have patients sign a release before obtaining any medical/billing records and before taking photo or video. Samples of these releases are available in the online toolkit. We also encourage students to work with the legal department at their individual hospitals and/or educational institutions.

Q: Do students have any liability while participating in this project?

A: By shadowing a patient over time, students will gain an in-depth understanding of how a complex patient experiences their illnesses and is able/unable to navigate the healthcare system. Their role in this process should be to learn from patients through accompaniment and observation. Through meeting with patients at their homes and accompanying them in the community, students will develop a relationship that can act as a source of support and encouragement, but will not be practicing medicine or attempting to provide care.

Q: What is the desired outcome of this project?

A: We believe that this is a valuable learning opportunity for students, and that their findings should be shared. We recommend that students meet with leadership at their schools to discuss what they've learned and to bring this knowledge back to their educational institutions. Patient stories can illuminate the flaws in our healthcare system. For this reason, we encourage students to have patients sign a release so that their stories can be shared with educational institutions and with the wider public.