Integrating the Social Determinants of Health Into Undergraduate Education

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**Background**

- In recent years, the WHO, NIH, and Associated Schools of Public Health have called for an emphasis on social determinants of health (SDH) in education.
- Graduate schools have made efforts to address this, but there remains a dearth of such resources at the undergraduate level.
- Our course aims to provide undergraduate students factual and theoretical tools to inform their volunteer experience at the Stanford Emergency Department (ED) “Help Desk,” where students screen patients for social needs, refer them to community resources, and follow up to ensure connection.
- The class’s service learning component involves both community organizations and patients, encouraging a more holistic understanding of SDH.

**Curriculum**

Titled “EMED 125: Social Emergency Medicine and Community Engagement,” the class meets weekly for a total of 10 sessions.

Lecture topics include:
- Homelessness
- Gun violence
- Food security
- Poverty & Rural Health

Weekly Reflections

Deep Dive training

Community Engagement Activity:
- Second Harvest Food Bank
- Serving breakfast to homeless

Each lecture covers:
- Relevance to emergency medicine
- Epidemiology
- Analytical frameworks
- Intervention models

Help Desk Shadowing in ED

**Final Project**

Build a learning module on a social emergency medicine topic of interest

**Educational Framework Applied to Course Design**

**Dimensions of Learning**
- Positive Attitudes & Perceptions About Learning
- Acquiring & Integrating Knowledge
- Extending & Refining Knowledge
- Using Knowledge Meaningfully
- Productive Habits of the Mind

**Course Component**
- Lecture/Instructors, Guest Speakers
- Lectures, Readings
- In-Class Discussions, Written Reflections
- Final Projects, Service Learning
- Service Learning, Written Reflections

**Detailed Implementation**
- Emphasize value of learning and service engagement in lectures
- Understanding topics & constructing models: Social EM, Public Health, Haddon’s Matrix
- Applying to personal experiences, proposing interventions, evaluating controversial issues
- Researching & building a Social EM module, interacting with community partners & ED pts.
- Changes in perspective in daily life & through Help Desk interactions

**Results: Student Impact**

- Were taking a service learning-based class for the first time
- Planned on seeking out such classes again in the future

Percent of students who believe that this course will have an impact on their future academic and career choices 96%

87%

Thought community placement experiences deepened their understanding of the course material beyond the classroom setting

86%

“In one class session, we talked about homelessness and the unique medical challenges that homeless individuals face. Shortly afterward, I encountered a patient in the ED who was homeless and seeking social needs resources. I was very grateful for the information I learned from the class and being able to apply it in a community setting.”

“Being directly involved in preparing food for those who needed it was especially meaningful, since food access is one of the major determinants of health we focused on in EMED 125.”

**Conclusions**

- The didactic component provides an effective academic framework to address manifestations of social determinants in different communities, while service learning increases retention and impact of course material.
- Challenges encountered include difficulties coordinating community service events amidst students’ busy schedules. Nonetheless, the majority of students enjoyed the service component and planned on participating again in the future.
- Future sessions of the class may alter the SDH topics covered and the extent of community service required in order to improve students’ motivation and commitment during the course.

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**References**