Improving Geriatric Education and Training in Iowa

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BACKGROUND / RATIONALE:

Iowa faces substantial challenges in providing health care to the elderly. With a population of 2.9 million, Iowa has the third highest proportion of citizens over age 65 and the highest proportion of citizens over age 85. Nearly 55% of Iowa's elderly reside in rural locations, posing significant challenges to health care delivery.

OBJECTIVE (S):

The primary objectives of the proposal are to:

1. Improve geriatric education and training of students, residents, and practicing physicians by implementing activities targeted to learners most likely to care for Iowa's frail elderly;
2. Improve the infrastructure for geriatric education and free time for our geriatricians to concentrate their efforts on teaching geriatrics and serve as role models;
3. Leverage new financial commitments from the University to develop a sustainable infrastructure for geriatric education and program development;

METHODS:

Several innovative instructional activities are being developed for medical students, residents, and community-based faculty. Activities are generally being targeted to learners at critical junctures in their careers that represent points at which trainees may be most impressionable, may be making career choices, or may recognize limitations in their clinical skills. To enhance the infrastructure for geriatric education, Reynolds Foundation funding will support the development of a faculty development program to improve teaching skills of geriatric faculty and enhance their status as role models and a Senior Mentors Program for first-year medical students. To support new educational and training programs, Foundation funding will be used to enhance the geriatric content of the core clerkships in Internal Medicine and Family Medicine and to develop the Geriatric Virtual Hospital, a web-based repository of information that will include teaching modules on 10 common geriatric syndromes and digitized lectures on 40 core geriatric topics that can be accessed at the convenience of learners.

FINDINGS / RESULTS:

Major accomplishments during the first 3 years include:

1) Refinement of a curriculum in ambulatory geriatrics for third year medical students;
2) Implementation of a Geriatrics Interest Group for medical students;
3) Development of a weekly lecture series in geriatric psychiatry;
4) Initiation of rotation in nursing home care for Family Medicine residents;
5) Development of 10 web-based interactive modules on common geriatric syndromes;
6) Development of an elective rotation in geriatrics for fourth-year medical students;
7) Development of a train-the-trainer program for instructing community-based preceptors in how to more effectively teach principles of geriatrics to University of Iowa students who rotate through their practices;
8) Development of a new curriculum in inpatient geriatrics for internal medicine and family medicine residents.

STATUS:

Project is ongoing.