“To study the phenomenon of disease without books is to sail an uncharted sea, while to study books without patients is not to go to sea at all.”
- Sir William Osler
World renowned British (Canadian-born) physician
(1849-1919)

Imagine the following scene. You arrive to your physician’s office for an annual checkup or simply to talk about a recent ailment you have been experiencing. You are welcomed by the physician’s office staff and escorted to the examining room. A few minutes later, you hear a knock at the door. You reply “Come in.” Instead of your doctor, you are greeted by a medical student......

The Importance of Patient Interaction with Medical Students

If you are thumbing through this brochure, most likely you are curious as to why there is a medical student in your doctor’s office. Your doctor has agreed to allow New Jersey Medical School students to rotate in his or her office because the education they will receive here is invaluable ---as a patient, you may play a part in this experience. During the past few years, an increasing number of studies have revealed that it is essential for medical students to have contact with patients during their medical school training. The British Medical Association reports that “patient contact is at the heart of learning.” Thus, medical students exposed to patient interaction (the earlier the better) are provided with the best foundation possible because it gives them “insight into the day-to-day role of a doctor and the patient perspective on specific conditions.”

Patient interaction also aids the student in developing vital traits of a good physician such as communication skills, clinical reasoning, and the value of cultural diversity. More importantly, patient interaction is one of the keys to solving a growing concern in the medical community, namely, restoring humanism and compassionate care to medicine.

“When practiced, humanism in medicine fosters relationships with patients…..that are compassionate and empathic.” Empathy is best taught by spending time in conversation with patients, listening to their stories, and sharing their experiences.

“Patient contact during a doctor’s training is generally seen to be a good thing – the earlier it starts the better.”
- Patient Oriented Learning: A review of the role of the patient in the education of medical students

Benefits of Patient Interaction with Students

The advantageous rewards from patient interaction during medical school training are not exclusive to medical students, but patients themselves have also found it beneficial to interact with medical students at their local doctor’s office. Some of the benefits derived are:

- Enjoyment of a detailed discussion with a keen medical student who is willing to listen and give you (the patient) a little extra time – a luxury only a medical student has.
- Lengthy discussions with a medical student may occasionally expose important information which may help in the patient’s care.
- Incredibly powerful positive feeling that comes from playing an essential role in the development of future physicians.

The Patient Centered Medicine Course

The New Jersey Medical School Patient Centered Medicine course is designed to provide first and second year medical students with the tools to navigate the practice of clinical medicine. The Patient Centered Medicine Preceptorship Program (which your doctor’s office is participating in) allows these students to have supervised patient interaction early on in their medical training so that they will have the opportunity to apply their fund of knowledge (learned in lecture and small group sessions) in real day-to-day doctor patient scenarios. Some of the activities our students may be involved in at your doctor’s office are:

- Taking parts of the basic history of the patient
- Perform some aspects of the physical exam
- Occasionally write up info gathered from the patient in a progress note

The future of the medical profession depends on the students that are training now. By allowing medical students to interact with you during your doctor’s visit, you are contributing to the education of future generations of doctors.

We hope this brochure has given you insight on to why it is so important for medical students to interact with patients. As mentioned, “patient contact is at the heart of learning” for all medical students. The doctors that participate in the Patient Centered Medicine Preceptorship Program are all voluntary clinical faculty of New Jersey Medical School. These doctors are unique in the sense that they practice “compassionate care” toward all the patients in their practice but also teach this “compassion” to the medical students that rotate through their offices. If for some reason, you feel uncomfortable interacting with our medical students, please inform your physician or his/her assistant. If you have any questions regarding New Jersey Medical School’s Patient Centered Medicine Course and Preceptorship Program, please feel free to call our office at 973-972-4823.
TESTIMONIALS

“The patient feels good when they talk to the students….its a good experience for both the student and patient.” – Dr. A.E.

“I noticed for the less than thirty crowd, the students relate better to my younger patients and the patients are happy to talk to them……..they come up with creative and helpful ideas that I would not have come up with myself……they are very good in organizing themselves and doing things…..my patients (younger and older) are very eager in helping the students to become better doctors.” – Dr. B.P.

“My patients thoroughly enjoy having the Patient Medicine Course medical students listen to their health concerns and the issues that bring them to the medical office.” – Dr. C.P.

“Not knowing what a Preceptorship was, I thought of it as an extra class that took away time from studying. However, on my first day Dr. H.T. was so heartwarming and informative that I immediately changed my view. Out of the goodness of their hearts, these physicians willingly volunteer their valuable time to enrich our medical education with real life opportunities to practice what we studied in class. For that, I truly appreciated every moment I was there. My preceptor and the residents were always patiently teaching me how to properly perform my task and were always taking their time in answering my questions. Not only were the physicians wonderful to work with, the patients I saw were amazing as well. As I reflect on my experience, I saw it as a time for practicing, making mistakes, and learning.” - Clara, NJMS Class of 2016

“I really enjoyed my experience with first year preceptorship. I took full histories and performed various sections of the physical exam. The guidance from the preceptor was extremely helpful. Above all, I appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to be the first member of the medical staff to take a patient’s history and prepare that information for my preceptor. This provided me with an ideal opportunity to get to know them, helping to build my confidence in the process of history-taking. It was a great feeling to know that I was providing compassionate and thorough care, honing my skills, while also learning important lessons from a very well trained and knowledgeable medical staff. You get the chance as a first year medical student to be a part of a team, ensuring proper medical treatment and help achieve a higher level of patient satisfaction.” - Seth, NJMS Class of 2016

References

   http://humanism-in-medicine.org/intros/gWhatIs.html
6. Student BMJ. Rachel Cornell. “Medical Students: benefit or burden?” (November 2006)
   < http://student.bmj.com/issues/06/11/careers/419.php>