Inter-professional primary palliative medicine education programs: Response to the growing workforce shortage

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Statement of the Problem: The rapid increase in demand for Palliative Care (PC) services has led to concerns regarding workforce shortages and threats to the resiliency of PC teams.

Objectives: To describe the development, implementation and evaluation of a regional interdisciplinary training program in PC.

Methods: Thirty (30) nurse and physician fellows representing 22 health systems across the Chicago region participated in a two-year PC training program. The curriculum was delivered through multiple conferences, self-directed e-learning and individualized mentoring by expert local faculty (mentors). Fellows shadowed mentors’ clinical practices and received guidance on designing, implementing and evaluating a Practice Improvement Project (PIP) to address gaps in PC at their institutions.

Results: Enduring, interdisciplinary relationships were built at all levels across health care organizations. Fellows made significant increases in knowledge and self-reported confidence in adult and pediatric PC and program development skills and frequency performing these skills. Fellows and mentors reported high satisfaction with the educational program.

Conclusion: This interdisciplinary PC training model addressed local workforce issues by increasing the number of clinicians capable of providing palliative care. Unique features include individualized longitudinal mentoring, interdisciplinary education, on-site project implementation and local network-building. Future research will address the impact of the addition of social work and chaplain trainees to the program.

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