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Background & Objectives:

- The Family Centered Experience (FCE), a course in the University of Michigan Medical School started in 2003 that is required of all students during their first two years, is designed to enhance students' understanding of the human side of medicine and the impact of illness on a patient and family [1].
- Pairs of medical students are matched with a patient-volunteer and his or her family for a series of home visits over two years.
- Each home visit is centered on a specific theme, such as the impact of illness on self and family, the relationship between doctors and patients, stigma and illness, and breaking bad news.
- After each visit, students return to the medical school where they discuss their impressions and insights in a small group setting.
- The goal of this program is to foster humanistic qualities and teach the value of patient-centered care in the preclinical years so that as medical students advance in their training and become physicians, they are able to maintain their focus on empathic care.
- Previous studies have investigated the impact of the program on medical students [2] and faculty instructors [3]; however, the long-term effects of the FCE have not been investigated.
- The overarching research question of this qualitative study was, "What is the long-term impact of this narrative-based program on former students?"

[1] Acad Med. 2008;83:653-658
[2] Adv Health Sci Edu. 2008;14:315-326.
[3] Acad Med. 2008;88:973-981

Methods:

- In-depth, face-to-face, interviews were conducted with former students of the FCE who have since graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School.
- Interviews consisted of open-ended questions that explored what former students remembered from the course and examined whether or not the FCE influenced the way they thought about and currently practice medicine.
- Comments were audio-taped, transcribed, and thematic analysis was performed using Grounded Theory methodology.
- Twenty former students were interviewed. Most respondents were either in their residency or fellowship. The average number of years since medical school graduation ranged from two to eight.

Results:

- Respondents reported that the FCE made them more aware of the patient's perspective and experiences with chronic disease and that they have drawn on the lessons that they learned from their volunteer families after becoming physicians.
- They also reported that the FCE impacted their patient care, especially when it came to making them cognizant of the importance of communication, empathy and compassion.
- Former students felt that the FCE was an important part of their preclinical years and reinforced to them why they had wanted to become physicians, emphasizing the humanistic side of medicine.

Quotes from Transcripts:

- *"You can't be a doctor without learning physiology and pathology and all of this. But you can't learn to be a doctor without understanding what it means to be a patient."*
- *"I certainly found it useful: talking to families and knowing that there are people behind the illnesses that we treat. It also made us think a little bit more about what it means when people go home; questions that may pop up at home; questions about accessibility to doctors....Things that are said in clinic can easily be forgotten. And that kind of brought it home for me."*
- *"I would emphasize that my experience was invaluable and the interactions with my FCE family are very clearly imprinted in the way that I practice medicine today. Mostly, in terms of understanding what my impact and actions as a physician have on the patient and family that I am taking care of because I was able to see it from the other side of things before I knew anything about the medical aspect of it."*
- *"I kind of see the FCE experience as the first step into a long process of growth and becoming a physician....it was an earlier experience with someone who was dealing with a chronic illness and understanding not all about the medicine but instead how it has affected their life."*



Conclusion:

- The Family Centered Experience has had a long-lasting impact on former students of the program, influencing the way they viewed the effect of chronic disease on a patient and their family while also influencing their views of medicine and the quality of care that they provide to their patients.