Medical Informatics Elective

by Jo Dorsch

Survey of Medical Informatics (ELEC 156) is a two-week online elective offered in the undergraduate College of Medicine curriculum. Medical Informatics is a field that concerns itself with the cognitive, information processing and communication tasks of medical practice, education and research, including the information science and the technology to support these tasks (Greenes & Shortliffe. JAMA. 1990;263:1114). This elective is designed to provide an overview of informatics using online lectures, readings, hands-on exercises, and threaded discussions. The goal is to build a foundation of information skills for information management, clinical decision-making, research, patient education, and lifelong learning.

The course was developed by Peg Burnette, Visiting Assistant Health Sciences Librarian-Peoria; Sandy De Groote, Scholarly Communications Librarian; and Jo Dorsch, Health Sciences Librarian-Peoria, as part of an integrated informatics curriculum at the College of Medicine at Peoria (UICOMP) that strives for informatics mastery as a core competency. UICOMP students are introduced to medical informatics and the basics of literature searching in the M2 year in the Epidemiology, Pharmacology, and Introduction to Clinical Medicine courses. Advanced searching and critical appraisal skills follow in the M3 Evidence-Based Medicine course in the Internal Medicine clerkship. The Survey of Medical Informatics targets M4 students interested in acquiring additional skills and exposure to the field in preparation for residency.

Assignments engage students in active learning in a variety of ways. Clinical case scenarios require the students to solve patient care problems using bibliographic and clinical databases, and to compare the resources in terms of scope and content. Readings foster student discussion of issues surrounding informatics topics in the news, such as electronic medical records, scholarly publishing, and health literacy. Students are asked to apply health literacy principles by creating effective patient education materials. Development of personalized reference management databases, Web gateways, and continuing medical education plans all contribute to achieving an individualized learning experience.

The course has proven popular, with over 50 students completing it since it was introduced in 2008. Since the elective is taught asynchronously through Blackboard, students find it convenient during the busy travel schedule of residency interviewing and enjoy the self-paced learning that it allows. A limited number of students from other campuses can be accommodated. For more information contact Jo Dorsch.

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