

Illinois SEARCH Program's Summer Pre-Clinical Curriculum

By Ruth Arway, SEARCH Coordinator, IPHCA



Pictured above are SEARCH Summer 2011 pre-clinical students, staff at Whiteside County Health Department/CHC in Rock Falls, IL, and Illinois SEARCH staff.

This past June, 15 second-year medical students participated in the new two-week structured SEARCH Pre-Clinical Curriculum developed by the Illinois SEARCH Program. Participants included students from Midwestern University; University of Illinois at Chicago; and, Saint Louis University. The program, developed in spring 2011, provides students with exposure to community health in the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) setting during medical students' early years of training.

Throughout the program, participants are offered a variety of learning experiences, including discussions, site visits, mentoring opportunities, and exposure to special populations and issues in the Chicago area and downstate, including urban and rural as well as homeless and migrant populations, and behavioral health.

Clinicians and staff from the following health centers presented to students at the IPHCA Chicago office: Howard Brown Health Center (behavioral health and the LGBT community); Chicago Family Health Center (combining FQHC practice and international work); Community Health Partnership of Illinois (migrant health issues); and Lawndale Christian Health Center (patient-centered medical home). Additionally, faculty at Northwestern University presented a session on cultural competency and the Western Illinois AHEC presented discussions on rural health, communication and health literacy.

During the session, students participated in all discussions and site visits, and completed two community assessment exercises based on visits to the sites (one urban and one rural); as well

as a summary/reflection paper, and evaluation of the two-week course. Six students also opted to build on the content provided through the two-week program by completing a SEARCH pre-clinical rotation at an assigned site to work on community-oriented activities or complete a project. Students completed rotations at the following SEARCH sites: Chicago Family Health Center, Community Health Improvement Center, Community Health Partnership of Illinois, Heartland Health Outreach, Inc. and PCC Community Wellness Center.

Mentoring opportunities are also provided through the SEARCH Summer Pre-Clinical Program as FQHC clinicians share their knowledge and experience in regard to community health issues and working within the FQHC setting. Following is a list of SEARCH sites that participated: Erie Family Health Center, Inc.; Whiteside Community Health Department/CHC; Heartland Health Outreach, Inc.; PCC Community Wellness Center; and, Heartland Community Health Clinic.

Through the evaluation, students provided positive feedback about presenters, site visits and other curriculum components, and shared ideas for the 2012 program. Participants also expressed gratitude to IPHCA for the development of this new program. Responses provided in the reflection papers demonstrate that students found the curriculum to be valuable and that the learning opportunities broadened their knowledge and perspectives of community health and FQHCs, clinicians at the center, and the health needs of the underserved.

Several themes emerged in the reflections of students who participated in the SEARCH 2011 Pre-Clinical Curriculum, including:

The Quality of FQHCs and Patient Care...

"The SEARCH Program exceeded my hopes. Through multiple discussions on FQHCs which covered their history, funding, goals, and organization, I can now say I have a clear picture of what an FQHC is and understand their important role in many communities.

This is despite not even knowing what an FQHC was before the program!"

FQHCs Meeting Community Needs...

"I now see that there are millions of people in our nation who depend on CHCs for immediate and long term care. . . We also spent time discussing health care disparities and health care competency in terms of cultural health. Not only did our site visits show us the huge strides made by FQHCs but it also shed light on the type of care people in this community deserve."

FQHCs: A Model of Quality Care for the Future...

"I was also glad to learn that CHCs receive bi-partisan support. It makes sense and is hard to argue that caring for people who desperately need it while decreasing overall costs is a good thing. The co-location of multiple health and wellness services along with linkage to other community resources integrates multiple components of achieving and maintaining a healthy lifestyle."

Clinicians and Mentors...

"What I was most struck with was that nearly every doctor or staff member who presented to us at the clinics seemed to love their job and take great pride in the clinic and their role within. They all seemed dedicated to a mission and really believe in their work and that they were making a difference."

The Illinois SEARCH Program plans to build on the success of this program in planning for next summer. For more information or to participate in the 2012 SEARCH Summer Pre-Clinical Curriculum, contact Ruth Arway at (312) 692-3030 or rarway@iphca.org. ■