

Optometrist in Court: Development and Summative Evaluation of an Innovative Educational Program

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Introduction

Optometric students learn about medical recordkeeping, diagnosis and treatment, and the role of other health care practitioners in the management of their patients. However, they do not participate in activities that give them experience in the legal consequences of poor recordkeeping, misdiagnosis, and failure to refer.

Subjects

Subjects came from a non-protected convenience sample of optometric students matriculating at Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry who are members of the College of Optometry's Honors Program. Eight third-year optometric students served as the subjects of the study.

Funding

This project was funded through the President's Faculty Research and Development Grant.

Purpose

By immersing students in the management of a patient and subsequent malpractice trial, subjects learned about factors that contribute to increased risk for medical malpractice. It was intended that students develop a heightened sensitivity to the need to keep accurate and complete medical records, properly diagnose and manage patients' conditions, and make timely referrals to other health care practitioners when

Activities

The subjects were introduced to the study in January 2007 during an orientation session held at the College of Optometry. A pre-test was administered in WebCT following orientation. They attended a lecture on medical malpractice thereafter. They reviewed the records for a patient posted in WebCT from January 2007 through February 2007. The subjects attended a mock jury selection session in March 2007 at the Nova Southeastern University Institute for Learning in Retirement. They also attended a day-long moot malpractice trial at Shepard Broad Law Center's courtroom in March 2007. Following the trial, the participants were interviewed in a focus group, and a post-test and opinion survey were administered in WebCT.

Methods

An explanatory single case study using an embedded case study design was employed. An opinion survey was administered to the subjects to determine the value of the program. A pre-test and post-test were administered to assess changes in knowledge about legal issues surrounding medical malpractice. A summative evaluation is being performed utilizing the theory-based CIPP Model for Evaluation.

Embedded Case Study

Within a single case study, there may be embedded subunits. In this study, the case contained several embedded subunits, including the malpractice law lecture, review of the patient's medical records, expert witness preparation, jury selection, moot court malpractice trial, focus group interview. Each of these embedded subunits is being evaluated as well as the overall program (Yin, 2003).

Other Participants

A law professor specializing in medical malpractice addressed the subjects on the subject, to complement written substantive materials they had read about it. In addition, law students served as attorneys and the plaintiff, and members of NSU's Lifelong Learning Institute served as jurors. An actual judge conducted the proceedings.

Measures/Administrati

The instruments used in this study included a pre- and post-test of knowledge about malpractice law; an opinion survey about the value of the program; and a set of questions to guide data collection during the focus group interview. Additionally, the orientation session, classroom session, jury selection session, witness preparation sessions, mock trial, and the focus group session were audio- and video-recorded by the University staff. Descriptive statistics are being used to analyze the results of the option survey. A dependent samples *t*-test is being used to analyze the pre- and post-test data. Educational process and product achievement is being measured, interpreted, and judged utilizing the CIPP Evaluation Model.

Conclusions

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no other optometric school has immersed optometric students in a medical malpractice environment. This research resulted in a significant increase in the subjects' knowledge about medical malpractice following the educational program. The subjects believed that participation in the program was of value to them. With some modifications, it appears is the program is sustainable and transportable.

References

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- Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA; SAGE Publications