The Millennials Meet the Boomers:
How One PA Program is Preparing Students for the Changing Age Demographic

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Session Objectives

At the conclusion of this session, participants will be able to:

1) describe the challenges of preparing students to interact with and care for the aging population

2) discuss how attitudes toward and empathy for geriatric patients might be improved through curricular projects

3) apply transformative learning theory to one program's multifaceted approach to geriatric education
US Population

The Administration on Aging

- By 2030 the number of persons age 65 years and older will have more than doubled the number in 2000.
- From 35 million in 2000 to a projected 72.1 million in 2030

Baby Boomers

- Born between years 1946-1964
- The oldest of this generation have already passed the age of 65 (turned 65 in 2011).
Life Expectancy

- 78.7 years of age
  - Preliminary data for 2011 (published Oct 2012) suggests that life expectancy will not change with the newest report.
  - Administration on Aging and US Social Security Administration predict rise in life expectancy over coming years.
Landscape of Medicine

The World Health Organization

- “It is **paramount** that health care workers are well versed in the diagnosis and management of the so called "four giants" of geriatrics (memory loss, urinary incontinence, depression and falls/immobility) **as well as the chronic diseases** that are common in later life and that can often be prevented or delayed.”

The Challenges

“Geriatric Giants”
- Memory
- Urinary Incontinence
- Depression
- Immobility & Instability

Others
- Hearing Impairments
- Visual Impairments
- Polypharmacy
- Chronic Pain & Illness
US Population

Millennial Generation

- Also called Generation Y
- Born 1982 to early 2000s
- Oldest of this group graduated from college in 2004
- Special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, achieving (entitlement, narcissism)
- As learners – desire experiential learning activities and enjoy teamwork

In PAEA’s 2010-2011 Annual Report on US PA Educational Programs (2013), the average age for 1st year enrollees was 26.1 years.
Medical Schools and PA Programs

- September 3, 2013
- Story about ‘The Buddy Program’ designed in 1998 by Darby Morhardt of the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine
- Similar programs utilized at Boston University, Dartmouth College, Washington University and other medical schools
1) Medical Interviews with Geriatric Volunteers
   - 1 on 1 partnering
   - Conducted in the geriatric volunteer’s home
   - 1-2 hours allotted

2) Geriatric Lab
   - Simulation of geriatric challenges
   - Follows a lecture that expands knowledge of geriatric patients

3) Luncheon (or other social event)
   - Relaxed atmosphere
   - Reunion
Goals of this Multifaceted Approach

- To expand PA students’ knowledge and understanding about the challenges that older patients face
- To improve attitudes of PA students toward older patients
- To increase empathy that PA students feel toward older patients
Medical Interviews

- Obtain volunteers
- Mail letter describing expectations and providing feedback form for the volunteer
- Students contact their volunteer to choose date and time
Geriatric Lab

Age Related Impairments:
A Simulation Exercise

- Designed by Monika Deppen Wood, MA of Rutgers University
- Published 2002 Gerontology and Geriatric Education
- UMU faculty found on MedEd PORTAL (a program of the Association of American Medical Colleges)
Geriatric Lab
Geriatric Lab
Geriatric Lab
‘Thank You’ Luncheon
Empathy Decline

- A Study of Empathy Decline in Physician Assistant Students at Completion of First Didactic Year (Mandel and Schweinle, 2012)
  - Investigation of empathy trends among PA students
  - 328 survey responses (270 females and 57 males)
    - Graduating classes of 2009-2014 at a northeastern university
    - Survey administered 3 times
      - Matriculation, End of didactic training, During clinical training
  - 62% had lower empathy scores at the end of the didactic training compared to matriculation
  - Decline in empathy among both genders during Physician Assistant training
Attitudes Towards Older Adults

- Attitudes of First-Year Physician Assistant Students Towards Older Adults (Steer, 2010)
  - Investigation of attitudes of first-year PA students regarding older adults
  - 36 students completed the Aging Semantic Differential
    - 58% female; 75% younger than 30 years old (range 22-45)
    - Western Michigan University
  - Mildly positive attitude towards older adults
  - Significant association
    - Students with weekly socialization with older adults had more positive attitudes towards them than did the students with yearly socialization
Transformative Learning

- In 1978 Jack Mezirow introduced this theory of learning where learning is more than just transmission of facts, ideas, behaviors, attitudes.

- “Mezirow postulated that learning is a process of recognizing the limitations of one’s current knowledge and perspectives and being challenged to think and grow beyond these limitations.”

Claire Babcock O’Connell, MPH, PA-C
Enhancing transformative learning in physician assistant education.
Keys to Transformative Learning

- Safe environment
- Critical reflection
- Support for all perspectives
- Respect for all involved

Goals
- Strike a balance between support and challenge
- Help students reflect on and learn from their experiences
Transformative Learning Applied

Surrounding interviews, geriatric lab, and luncheon

- Goals to challenge *and* to support kept in mind
- Open and honest conversation
- Respectful conversation
- Room for all perspectives
- Critical reflection and discussion facilitated
Powerful New Ideas

Some of the geriatric volunteers...

- have trouble staying on topic.
- are incredibly busy and engaged.
- don’t get out much.
- are physically active.
- still enjoy intimacy.
- are enjoyable to be around.
- are very lonely.

Diversity among those within this age group must be respected even as we learn generalities (cultural competence).
Student Feedback

“I believe I have a greater appreciation and love for elderly people after the summer term. I've always been able to connect with and truly empathize with their emotions, but now I have an even deeper understanding of the kinds of issues this population faces. I feel even more motivated to be a vessel of warmth and love for them.”

“I think my favorite part [of the H&P I course] was meeting with the geriatric patients because that gave us a chance to practice all that we had been learning... and on a REAL person!”
Getting Started

- Contact local senior living center.
  - Activities Director
- Obtain *Age Related Impairments: A Simulation Exercise.*
  - [http://crab.rutgers.edu/~deppen/teach.html](http://crab.rutgers.edu/~deppen/teach.html)
  - Utilize in lab or other small group setting.
  - Be creative.
- Plan social event in your program budget.
- Create an atmosphere for transformative learning.

Next step...
- Collect data
References


References (cont.)

- Wood MD. Experiential learning for undergraduates: A simulation about function change and aging. Gerontology & Geriatrics Education. 2002;23(2).