At Loyola, virtual training boosts BP-measurement skills

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When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, U.S. medical students had little choice but to embrace online instruction. But that doesn’t mean virtual learning was always on par with in-person education.

The second portion of a two-part webinar, “Advancing Student BP Measurement Training,” explores a project at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine that sought to improve virtual learning of the physical exam by boosting students’ blood pressure measurement skills. Its centerpiece was the AMA’s “BP Measurement Essentials: Student Edition” module, the first element in the “Student BP Measurement Essentials” e-learning series.

This project and the five others profiled in the webinar were funded by grants from AMA Improving Health Outcomes.

Student-led innovation

“Once COVID-19 settled in, everything became virtual,” said project lead Lindsey Staszewski, a fourth-year medical student at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. “Medical students were learning how to do physical exam steps and blood pressure measurement on mannequins and were typically isolated in their own homes, without anyone to help with practice or assessment.”

Staszewski was one of eight medical students across the U.S. who had served on the AMA’s Student eLearning Advisory Team, which provided feedback on the module prior to its release to the public. Going into her third year, she had been looking to do something that would contribute to her bioethics capstone project. She noticed that second-year students had completed their first year of medical school in a completely virtual format.

“My big motivation was to see how we could improve student BP measurement in a virtual format, since that’s where most medical school instruction had gone,” she said in a separate interview, noting...
that the project was incorporated into her school’s patient-centered medicine course.

Learn more about how medical schools are driving better BP measurement.

Marked improvement in key areas

Before taking the module, students had an average score of 5.81 out of 10 on BP measurement skills. After completing the module, their average score jumped to 7.03.

The students also showed dramatic improvements in two vitally important areas: They improved from 10.5% to 50% in proper cuff placement and from 18.4% to 65% in patient preparation and positioning.

“Both of these topics were addressed in student feedback as not being something that was emphasized or taught in their current curriculum,” Staszewski noted in the webinar. “This just goes to show that the essentials blood pressure measurement module really served as an adjunct to what they had been learning in a virtual setting already.”

Read about how at UC Davis, diversity drives better BP measurement training.

Building on success

Staszewski is now working with faculty and administrators at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine to figure out how to make the module a permanent fixture of the school’s curriculum.

“This prolonged shift to virtual education can alter how students feel they’re benefiting from their education,” she said. “I wanted to make sure they felt they were receiving adequate preparation and assessment and practice of these really important skills.”

As a case in point, for three-quarters of the 38 students in the project, the only prior training they had in BP was a prerecorded video.

“An identical number said they would use the module again to prepare for clinical rotations,” Staszewski said.

The second module in the e-learning series, "Self-Measured Blood Pressure Essentials: Student Edition," covers how to partner with patients to improve blood pressure measurement at home. A third module provides a refresher of the first module’s learning objectives.
The “Student BP Measurement Essentials” e-learning series is part of the AMA Ed?Hub™, an online platform with high-quality CME and education that supports the professional development needs of physicians and other health professionals. With topics relevant to you, it also offers an easy, streamlined way to find, take, track and report educational activities.

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