



AN OBESITY-FOCUSED CLINICAL PUBLIC HEALTH SUMMIT: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH



THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



Washington, DC

Educators from the School of Medicine and Health Sciences developed an immersive, 3-day experiential learning summit to teach third-year medical students about the social cultural influencers of obesity and what clinicians can do to mitigate them. This curriculum could be adapted by other professions and/or programs with interest in fostering clinical-community linkages.

SCENARIO

It is essential that physicians not only learn effective strategies to understand and manage obesity in the clinical setting but also be equipped to act as agents of change in communities grappling with food deserts, health inequity, and other social determinants of obesity.

SMHS faculty sought to provide students with more opportunities to translate their developing health care knowledge into actions that address pressing population health issues like obesity. To this end, they developed and piloted a multi-day Summit during which third-year medical students are challenged to integrate their knowledge of the clinical aspects of obesity and recent patient experiences to devise ways to mitigate obesity at the community level.

Preparing for the Clinical Public Health Summit on Obesity

Prior coursework and clinical experiences were important for preparing students to engage meaningfully in the Obesity Summit.



Didactic presentation on clinical aspects of obesity:

The initial phase focused on clinical aspects of obesity. Students learned how to translate their understanding of the health effects of obesity to public policy approaches.



Interviews to understand the patient experience:

During their first clerkship, students conducted patient interviews and gained a stronger understanding of patients' experience with obesity and barriers to healthier behaviors. These encounters encouraged students to recognize and begin challenging negative biases toward patients with obesity.

About the Educators



School of Medicine & Health Sciences (SMHS)



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KEY COMPETENCIES:

- Obesity as a Disease
- Disparities/Inequities in Care
- Integration of Community Care
- Language for Obesity
- Addressing Weight Bias & Stigma
- Strategies for Patient Care



CURRICULUM

During an intersession shortly after beginning their clinical clerkships, medical students participated in a 3-day applied learning experience (“Summit”) focused on addressing obesity in the District through application of an **equity-oriented framework**. The Summit included presentations from experts in the field, participation in plenary sessions and break-out discussions, and community site visits. These experiences provided the foundation for students to develop and present proposals to mitigate obesity at both the clinical and community levels.

SMHS Clinical Public Health Summit on Obesity

Students visited sites throughout the District, where they heard about the experiences of residents, local food experts, employers, policymakers, and community organizations. In interacting with leaders of the communities that surround the University, students saw first-hand the issues impacting their patients and what can be done to address them. Students also worked with the GW Office of Innovation & Entrepreneurship to learn and practice skills in human-centered design, enhancing their experience of working alongside communities and sparking innovation.



During plenary sessions and discussions led by representatives from local and national community organizations (e.g. YMCA of the USA, Common Threads, DC Greens, ASTHO), teams of students explored creative approaches to restructuring health systems, improving access to non-stigmatizing obesity care, promoting healthy eating, and improving physical activity habits.

Small student groups were partnered with Community-Based Organizations. Using information gleaned from their first two years of medical school, plenary sessions, and site visits, teams worked alongside their community partners using “upstream” intervention techniques focused on addressing social determinants of obesity to develop an innovative solution to mitigate obesity in children and adults.

OUTCOMES

The Summit culminated in student presentation of their proposals to address population-level dimensions of obesity in Washington, D.C. Teams received immediate feedback from panels of experts on obesity, nutrition, physical activity, and policy.

In 2018, the winning team worked closely with their community partner – a local supermarket – to design a campaign that incorporated innovative marketing, community engagement, and environmental conservation to expand access to and consumption of healthy food options among residents in an underserved D.C. community.

Awards to honor student achievements:

- ✓ **Implementation Award:** Highest honor given at the Obesity Summit. In recognition of the academic team with the most outstanding community-based design selected as most likely for implementation.
- ✓ **Innovation Award:** In recognition of the academic team with the most novel design thinking community-based approaches to influence the health of their selected population
- ✓ **Best Presentation Award:** In recognition of the academic team with the most outstanding presentation of a community-based program/ policy intervention.



GW students must learn how to be active participants in developing community and population-level interventions, programs, and policies that promote healthy weight in the communities they serve. And we must teach them how to do that.

– **Lawrence “Bopper” Dayton, MD, MSPH**
Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Public Health



Additional information about this curriculum is available from: <https://smhs.gwu.edu/academics/md-program/curriculum/clinical-public-health/clinical-public-health-summits>

