

The Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Medicina en Español Program

Overview

The Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States. By one estimate 52% of the residents in the East Harlem community that Mount Sinai Medical Center and its affiliated hospitals serve are Hispanic. It is also estimated that 20-25% of patients seen in Mount Sinai out patient clinics are Spanish-speaking only. As the Hispanic population increases, so, too, will the need for medical professionals to understand the cultural backgrounds and language abilities of the patients they serve.

The Need

Studies have shown that language barriers have a direct effect on medical access as well as on patient compliance and satisfaction. At a time when minorities are still underrepresented in medicine, more and more physicians will need to have a working knowledge of medical Spanish in order to obtain adequate medical histories and to provide competent treatment plans for their Spanish speaking patients. In 2003, Mount Sinai medical students, who often encounter Spanish-speaking patients in the course of their rotations, approached the Mount Sinai faculty and requested a medical Spanish program. With the assistance and guidance of the Center for Multicultural and Community Affairs, the Medicina en Español Program was established.

The Curriculum

- As a result of collaboration with the faculty from the Arts and Science of Medicine Courses, the subjects of the Spanish language courses parallel what students are learning in their medical training.
- The Spanish language curriculum was developed by Primera Languages, a company which specializes in teaching Spanish to professionals. MSSM bilingual faculty supplement the teaching of Primera instructors, by inviting students to observe them in during their encounter with patients.
- Since 2005, three separate course modules, each with three language proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced) have been available to first and second year medical students.

Future Directions

- The program will develop a complete four-year language curriculum that both parallels and will be integrated into the medical school curriculum
- For those students who cannot enroll in the semester long programs, there will be an intensive two-day summer Spanish course focusing on fundamentals in grammar and conversation. This will increase the overall percentage of students who have a basic knowledge of medical Spanish
- The program has developed a standardized Spanish-language patient teaching case for the Morchand Center for Clinical Competence. A pilot case was initiated in June 2007 with a goal for incorporation into the curriculum.

With the establishment and development of the Medicina en Español Program, the Mount Sinai School of Medicine has assured that its students—and the physicians they become—can treat their Spanish-speaking patients with the same high quality of care as all their patients.