

The Institute for Medical Education

MARY R. RIFKIN, PH.D., AND LAWRENCE G. SMITH, M.D.*

THE INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL EDUCATION (IME) at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine (MSSM) was founded in 2001 to provide a “home base” for teachers and to support and enhance educational creativity and scholarship at Mount Sinai. The IME, thus, resembles other “teaching academies” at several other academic medical centers (1). In the few years since its inception, the IME has become a center for teaching excellence; it has promoted educational scholarship among the teaching faculty; it has encouraged curricular and teaching innovation for undergraduate, graduate, and continuing medical education; it has sponsored events that highlight the value of education in the life of Mount Sinai; and it has mentored teaching faculty in order to foster their professional development and academic advancement.

Membership and Benefits

Membership in academies or societies of teaching faculty at other institutions often requires nomination and selection and is often time-limited (2, 3). The IME at Mount Sinai is a comprehensive membership organization for all faculty, full-time or voluntary, of the School of Medicine and its affiliated hospitals. An on-line membership form has been created to simplify the application for membership, for all interested faculty. IME members include those faculty throughout the community who have expertise and/or interest in teaching the next generation of practitioners, who wish to share their ideas about education both at Mount Sinai and at their respective discipline-oriented national meetings, who wish to improve their teaching skills, who see teaching as an important component of their professional activity, or who devote scholarly effort to education research. The Institute currently has over 100 members.

Membership in the Institute entitles one to participate in the many professional development activities organized by the IME, including workshops and re-

treats; become eligible for small grant support for educational innovations; and receive a second letter of support for promotion on the clinician-educator track.

The IME has an appointed director, who is assisted in implementing Institute programs by a program director and program coordinator. The IME is monitored and guided by a 15-member Internal Oversight Committee (IOC), comprised of faculty with acknowledged reputations for excellence in the area of teaching and learning. The IOC meets twice a year.

Professional Development

The IME has created opportunities for faculty development throughout the entire teaching community, for specific groups (e.g., residents, students), and through customized educational experiences.

Education Leadership Conference

The goal of the Education Leadership Conference, sponsored annually by the Institute, is to provide an annual faculty development off-campus retreat for all course directors, clerkship directors, deans and other educational leaders at the MSSM and its affiliate institutions. The conference provides a forum for them to address the most challenging aspects of their roles and exchange ideas with their colleagues. This day also provides faculty with an opportunity to reflect on their roles as educational leaders and their continued professional development. In addition, it encourages communication among those who play key instructional roles in the undergraduate program at the MSSM, links colleagues and resources, and introduces new topics and ideas. Every year the conference has a new theme, such as “Evaluation,” “Content Reform,” and “Educational Leadership.”

Sponsorship for National Programs

To develop leadership abilities of faculty, whether in the realm of education or administration, the IME helps faculty apply for highly competitive faculty development programs, such as the training course in clinical teaching sponsored by the Stanford Faculty Development Center, the Harvard-Macy Fellowship for Medical Educators, or the Harvard-Macy Institute’s Program for Leaders in Medical Education.

Building the teaching skills of basic science educators is an important mission of the Institute.

From the Department of Medical Education, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, NY.

Address all correspondence to Mary R. Rifkin, Ph.D., Box 1623, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, One East 100th Street, New York, NY 10029.

*Current position: Chief Academic Officer, North Shore Long Island Jewish Health System, Great Neck, NY.

Key Words: Medical education, teaching, education.

The IME has sponsored the attendance of faculty at the International Association of Medical Science Educators annual conference. As a result, many faculty members are more aware of nationwide issues and initiatives in the area of the basic science education of medical students.

Workshops

The IME offered a two-session Grant Writing Workshop in 2003. The workshop was primarily intended for Institute members who planned to write grant proposals to obtain funding for educational projects and research. The goal for each participant was to produce a working outline, including a rationale, for expansion and eventual submission. Twenty Institute members attended this workshop.

In 2004 the IME sponsored a two-session workshop that served to inform medical educators about methods for using “standardized patients” (SP) in teaching and assessment, and encouraged faculty to develop specific SP cases for teaching and/or assessment purposes. In the first session participants were introduced to the SP case template and discussed formats for SP use. Participants formed small working groups to generate ideas of how this methodology could be most effectively used in their own courses/programs, and subsequently teamed up in pairs to begin creating patient cases. In the second session, participants submitted their SP cases for review and comments by assigned facilitators.

Medical Education Grand Rounds

Every two weeks throughout the academic year, a seminar series features current topics in medical education, discussed either by invited speakers from other institutions or by Mount Sinai faculty. These seminars, offered to the entire faculty, bring visibility to education scholarship, innovative curriculum reform, and new programs to the entire institution.

Teacher Appreciation Day

Teacher Appreciation Day is held annually to honor outstanding faculty from the School of Medicine and affiliate hospitals of the Medical Center. Teacher Appreciation Day recognizes faculty who have achieved excellence in teaching. A monetary award and framed citation are given out at a reception to which all nominees and nominators are invited.

Promotions on the Educator Track

A faculty member’s contributions to teaching often go unnoticed in consideration for promotion.

Mount Sinai recently revised its appointments and promotions process, adopting a Clinician and/or Educator Track in order to promote faculty who spend a significant part of their professional activities in clinical practice and/or education. Thus, although all faculty are expected to be competent as teachers, excellence in educational activities is now a primary criterion for promotion at Mount Sinai. And documentation of teaching scholarship is essential for evidence of educational excellence. Thus, the Director of the Institute will advise individual faculty members on the preparation of a teaching portfolio and help to prepare a Chair’s statement for the Appointments and Promotions Committee. In this way, as in others, the IME helps Mount Sinai faculty members to advance their professional careers.

Teaching Skills

Resident Teaching Development Program (RTDP)

The RTDP, under the leadership of nationally trained junior faculty, strives to improve the teaching and leadership skills of all our residents at Mount Sinai Hospital and its affiliates. The objectives of the program are (a) to create a curriculum that provides residents with practical teaching and leadership skills and is adaptable to the needs of any specialty; and (b) to increase residents’ confidence in their teaching ability and improve their attitudes towards their roles as teachers.

The daylong course is taught to postgraduate year 2 residents and consists of three core modules: Setting Goals and Expectations, Teaching Theory and Techniques, and Giving Feedback. Each module is approximately 2 hours in length. The program directors collaborate with chief residents and program directors of multiple departments to tailor the curriculum to each specialty. They have created relevant clinical case examples and role-plays that highlight issues unique to each department.

Resources relevant to this program are listed on the web, so that residents can readily access more information. The RTDP also fulfills many of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education competencies required for all graduate medical education training programs.

Teach the Teacher

Residents are often the primary teachers of interns and medical students in academic medical centers but are rarely given any formal preparation for teaching. Moreover, few faculty have the training to implement and teach a resident teaching skills program. The Teach the Teacher program is proving to

be an effective means of training faculty to establish a teaching skills program in their own departments so that the education of residents as teachers becomes self-sustaining within a department. Faculty interested in teaching the curriculum attend a two-day workshop. The curriculum, as well as additional resources for teaching faculty, is available on the web.

Fourth-Year Student Elective—Becoming a Medical Teacher

In 2004 an innovative course on the “nuts and bolts” of adult learning principles and practical teaching techniques was offered for the first time to fourth-year medical students. This three-week elective course provides students with some formal training to excel as effective clinical teachers. The students go through the entire Stanford Faculty Development Program in Clinical Teaching Skills and attend small group sessions on various teaching techniques. Especially helpful are the opportunities that the students have to be videotaped while teaching and to receive extensive feedback on those teaching sessions.

Education Leadership Institute

Currently only a small handful of programs offer intensive teacher training to medical students, and there is a lack of any national train-the-trainer program for medical students interested in correcting this deficiency. In order to address this problem, the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), in partnership with MSSM and the IME, developed the first *Training Tomorrow's Teachers Today (T4)* Program in 2004.

The program is an intense five-day experience intended to provide medical students who are interested in academic medicine, with practical teaching and leadership skills. By the end of the week each student is expected to have developed a project to be implemented at his or her medical school. Thus far, the projects have ranged from sessions designed to cultivate teaching skills among fellow medical students, instructing resident physicians in effective methods of evaluation and providing feedback, and novel ways to increase medical student participation in curricular affairs.

Curricular Innovation

Educational Research Day

Educational Research Day is an annual event on campus that highlights the exciting, creative work in educational research, analysis and innovation taking place every day at Mount Sinai and its affiliates.

The half-day event includes a plenary session with an invited speaker, and a poster session at which posters by teaching faculty and house-staff are presented. The IME not only provides consultation for submissions, but also underwrites the cost of preparing the posters. A selection committee reviews all abstracts, which are published in an abstract book, and “blue ribbons” are awarded to selected posters for their excellence in curricular innovation. In addition, four posters are selected for presentation at the annual “Associate of American Medical Colleges Innovations in Medical Education” exhibit.

Website

To efficiently disseminate information about the IME's activities and also to serve as a resource for educators, the Institute maintains a website (www.mssm.edu/medschool/institute/index.shtml) that is constantly updated with new information for faculty. The website has on-line forms for membership application, abstract submission for Education Research Day, and nominations for Teacher Appreciation Awards. A new feature of the website is the “Education Spotlight,” in which a faculty member or a program is highlighted in a question-and-answer format. Faculty are informed of new additions/updates to the website by e-mail, using the faculty listserv or Institute member listserv.

Summary

The Institute for Medical Education has developed a superb foundation upon which to build an outstanding center for the training of current and future medical educators and to nurture faculty who choose a career as educational leaders. While the Institute has already developed an impressive array of programs for its members and the education faculty at large, a number of initiatives remain to be developed.

The activities and events described in this report constitute a vibrant program for faculty development, teacher training, and curricular innovation in medical education. We anticipate that in the coming years, the Institute, by its broad range of programs, will help the Mount Sinai School of Medicine become a nationally recognized center for the training of medical educators.

References

1. Irby DM, Cooke M, Lowenstein D, et al. The academy movement: a structural approach to reinvigorating the educational mission. *Acad Med* 2004; 79:729–736.
2. Cooke M, Irby DM, Debas HT. The UCSF Academy of Medical Educators. *Acad Med* 2003; 78:666–672.
3. Thibault GE, Neil JM, Lowenstein DH. The Academy at Harvard Medical School: nurturing teaching and stimulating innovation. *Acad Med* 2003; 78:673–681.