



Short Communication

Description of a medical Spanish elective course for pharmacy students

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Abstract

As the Spanish-speaking population in the United States continues to increase, the encounters between pharmacists and Spanish-speaking individuals will also increase. As a result, there is a need to provide educational training to student-pharmacists in order to effectively communicate and counsel Spanish-speaking patients. The authors describe the development and evolution of a Medical Spanish course including learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment materials.

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Introduction

The proportion of the population who speak Spanish as a primary language in the United States continues to increase. According to the 2010 US Census, 50.5 million or 16% of the total population were of Hispanic or Latino origin.¹ This is an increase from 35.3 million and 13% of the total population in the 2000 census. The majority of the population growth in the United States is from the increase in the Hispanic population.¹ By 2020, 16% of the population five years of age or older is projected to speak Spanish.²

Limited English proficiency patients, including Spanish-speaking individuals, are at high risk for adverse events from medications.³ Many of these patients do not receive adequate counseling in regard to directions, dosages, or side effects despite the fact that the majority of states require patient counseling by a pharmacist.

As a result, colleges of pharmacy across the United States have responded to the need for student-pharmacists' training in Spanish. Examples of educational activities to

improve student-pharmacists' knowledge include cultural competency courses,^{4–6} outreach events/clinics,⁷ mission trips,^{8,9} lectures in a pharmaceutical care laboratory course,¹⁰ and medical Spanish courses.¹¹ Although these activities have provided opportunities for student-pharmacists to practice some Spanish-speaking skills, an in-depth description of a semester-long Spanish course for student-pharmacists is lacking. Providing an in-depth description of this course would provide valuable information to institutions considering developing a Medical Spanish course as well as those who currently offer a similar course but may be considering modifications.

The importance of educating student-pharmacists on the Spanish language and culture cannot be overstated. The Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) 2013 Educational Outcomes state in their premise that “pharmacists now and of the future must be capable of ...providing care for diverse patient populations.”¹² This is further elaborated in Domain 3: Approach to Practice and Care under the subdomains of cultural sensitivity and communication. The CAPE 2013 panel recommends that students, upon graduation, should “recognize social determinants of health to diminish disparities and inequities in access to quality care.”¹² A Spanish course specifically geared to the curricular needs of student-pharmacists can

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help fulfill the abovementioned outcomes and provide student-pharmacists with a much needed skill set.

Course description

The Medical Spanish course at Wingate University School of Pharmacy (WUSOP) has been in place as part of the original curriculum, administered to the first class in 2005, since it is taught during the third year of the curriculum. At this time, it was a required course for students in the third professional year. In 2011, the Medical Spanish course was changed to an elective option as recommended by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE). Prior to 2014, the course was not taught by a pharmacist, but rather had other pharmacist faculty supporting the course in order to meet the needs of the students. The authors took over the course in the fall of 2014. This course was offered to both campuses starting in 2013, and thus Polycom[®] (San Jose, CA), video conferencing technology, was used to reach our distance campus. There is also an instructor on each campus to teach and facilitate activities. This is a one credit hour course for third-year student-pharmacists, taught in a 50-minute class period once a week, usually in the fall semester. Since this course is currently an elective offering, the class is limited to 30 students. This is about one-third of the third-year class. The course was also initially graded with letter grades, but is now a pass/fail course, consistent with current practice for elective courses within the School of Pharmacy. Course grades consist of participation, four quizzes, a midterm and final oral exam, and a pocket guide, all contributing 20% each. Resources for the course include online websites and Spanish books for medical professionals.

The course, at first, mainly consisted of learning basic vocabulary along with medical terminology taught by a pharmacy professor. The course over the years was taught by several different Spanish-speaking high school teachers in the area with the most recent one teaching the course for several years in a row. Due to her primary job, she was not able to continue as the instructor, which is when the authors took over the course. The material was memorized by the students mainly for exam purposes only. When pharmacist faculty began supporting the course and the instructor, the course became more interactive and more pharmacy focused. The students participated in more active learning activities, and the exams were oral, but mainly translating phrases and sentences. When the authors took over the class in 2014, the course objectives and outline were maintained; however, the active learning strategies became more intricate and the students were role-playing various scenarios that may be encountered in the community pharmacy setting. Continued from previous years, the students created a pocket guide they could use in the future for patient communication.

Course objectives are listed in [Table 1](#). When the course was modified in 2010, the objectives also changed to

incorporate more cultural awareness and preparing a pocket guide for students to carry with them after they finish the course. These objectives changed from basic communication skills in Spanish to a more conversational approach along with an added cultural component to better understand the Hispanic population and their health care needs.

In 2014, the instructors placed much more emphasis on a community pharmacy perspective when designing activities to suit the current course objectives. All the active learning was tailored to what the students might experience in this type of setting. The learning management system platform, Moodle (West Perth, Western Australia), allows for many different ways for the students to interact with the language. Moodle is the standard platform at WUSOP. A discussion board was used to allow students to post words, phrases, or sentences to be translated into Spanish. Audio, created by the instructors, was also uploaded to allow students to practice their listening skills. Additional resources were also given to the students such as Spanish websites, radio stations, television stations, etc., so that they could practice the different skills ([Table 2](#)).

There were no Spanish pre-requisites required to take this course. Thus, most of the students taking the course have limited Spanish skills. The course begins with the basic alphabet and correct pronunciation. The course follows with numbers (age, date, year, address, telephone number, and zip codes), time, days of the week, and months of the year. Additional topics include colors, parts of the body, translating a prescription into Spanish (including different routes of administration), side effects, storage, and over-the-counter (OTC) recommendations. Coping skills were also discussed to help the student if they could not understand the patient or was having difficulty in communicating. These skills included asking the patient to repeat themselves, to speak slower, to write the answer, to use pictures to convey time of day to take the medication, etc. Cultural differences were also discussed with respect to interacting with Spanish-speaking persons, cultural beliefs, medical services, and medication instructions and adherence. Those students who did have some knowledge of the Spanish language were encouraged to help those students that had limited skills. There were not any modifications for these more “advanced” students; however, they tended to help their peers learn along with reviewing the information themselves. This also allowed them to practice their pronunciation.

Another unique aspect of the course is that the students are not allowed to speak English in class unless they were asking the question of “How do you say _ in Spanish?” The professors also spoke only Spanish in the course to allow the students to have more listening practice with the language. For this reason, the professors would model the activity initially for the students, and then the students were expected to complete the activity. The students were uneasy initially when they were told that only Spanish would be spoken. However, over time, students have stated both in course evaluations and in personal conversation or

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