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# Fulfilling the Health Care Economics Milestones: Adopting an Online Curriculum for Radiology Residency Programs

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Arising from the ACGME 1998 Outcome Project initiative, the Next Accreditation System (NAS) was instituted in July 2013 to satisfy the need to monitor the progress of resident physicians' training in the 6 core competencies: patient care, medical knowledge, practice-based learning and improvement, systems-based practice (SBP), professionalism, and interpersonal skills and communication. The NAS emphasizes an outcomes-based educational system that sequentially tiers and outlines the necessary skills and knowledge that residents must learn and demonstrate during their residency training. It also establishes more detailed systems and methods than previously described to evaluate proficiency within these 6 core competencies [1,2].

Part of the NAS is a standard to which residents and programs can refer while tracking through their training. The ACGME and the ABR collaborated on The Diagnostic Radiology Milestone Project. In 2012, this working group developed milestones for the 6 core competencies. The milestones "provide a framework for the assessment of the development of the resident physician in key dimensions of the elements of physician competency in a specialty or subspecialty" [3]. The milestones comprise sequentially increasing levels of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other

attributes for each of the ACGME competencies organized in a developmental framework. They are descriptors and targets for resident performance through the radiology residency; a level is completed when the resident attains the milestones in that level (Table 1).

Nicholson et al [2] allude to various methods and varying spans of time for sequential progression through the milestones during a radiology residency. For example, in many programs, the medical knowledge competency will be "attained in sequential order by levels that correspond to the year of residency training. Other milestones may be better suited to facilitating residents to achieve all levels in a single rotation or by way of a dedicated curriculum designed specifically to meet that milestone." They go on to explain that the health care economics milestones specifically, as incorporated into the SBP competency, may be achieved by this latter technique of a dedicated curriculum [2].

Of the 6 core competencies, SBP is perhaps the least intuitive to most residents, owing to "the traditional focus of radiology residency programs on teaching successful interpretation and performance of diagnostic images and procedures, respectively" [4], and corresponding with a dearth of SBP curricula in most residency programs.

Compounding the limited amount of available curriculum is the lack of equal resident concentration on the nonclinical curriculum. Some, if not most residents, given the largely unfamiliar nature of SBP and the more pressing needs to learn important interpretive skills within the finite educational time available, tend to show less interest in SBP's fundamental aspects: health care economics and business practice [5]. However, numerous voices in recent years have promoted the importance of mastering business concepts for residents and practicing radiologists, to ensure successful practice in the 21st century [4,6-8]. Because of its newly acknowledged importance and establishment as a core competency, SBP will require a robust effort to effectively compete with the evolutionary level and progress realized by the other competencies.

Aiming to distill the essential components of SBP into a set of milestones, Todd Miller and Charles Resnik [9], in conjunction with the Association of Program Directors in Radiology (APDR), delineated 5 specific, achievable deliverables as part of the health care economics milestones (outlined in Table 2), matched with each milestone-level definition.

Before the release of the health care economics milestones, surveys of residents and radiology residency

**Table 1.** Milestone definitions from The Diagnostic Radiology Milestone Project, developed in 2012 by collaboration of the ACGME and the ABR

Level	Milestone Definition
1	The resident demonstrates milestones expected of one who has had some education in diagnostic radiology.
2	The resident is advancing and demonstrating additional milestones.
3	The resident continues to advance and demonstrate additional milestones; the resident consistently demonstrates the majority of milestones targeted for radiology.
4	The resident has advanced so that he or she now substantially demonstrates the milestones targeted for residency. This level is designed as the graduation target.
5	The resident has advanced beyond performance targets set for residency and is demonstrating “aspirational” goals, which might describe the performance of someone who has been in practice for several years. It is expected that only a few exceptional residents will reach this goal.

program directors acknowledged an unmet need to address business concepts in residency [4]. Some programs had addressed this need by incorporating unique curricula developed and administered by faculty well versed in the subject. For example, Stephen Chan details a seminar-based, 4-year Radiology Management curriculum at the Columbia University program, which was welcomed by residents and faculty alike [10]. Scott Mirowitz and others [11,12] described a new curriculum at the Washington University program, which was so well received that 61% of polled residents can see

themselves personally involved in administration or organized radiology. Finally, Otero et al [13] developed a comprehensive, 2-year curriculum to address the full gamut of SBP concepts. Features shared by these curricula are relatively short-interval, didactic sessions (up to 1 hour), combined with case-based discussions.

As effective as the aforementioned curricula are, they arise from larger academic programs with the resources to provide faculty who have a professional or educational background in radiology management and business practice. However, smaller programs

with fewer resources, and faculty who are relatively inexperienced in business, are challenged to duplicate such successes. Nicholson et al [2] explain that one of the aims of the milestone project is to “foster creative and innovative solutions to meet . . . curricular gaps” brought to light by implementation of the milestones. As programs address these curriculum requirements, there “will be the development of materials and curricula that can be shared with other institutions, resulting in the standardization of practice; development of best practices; and decreasing the variability of graduate medical training in radiology.” In that spirit, we reviewed the APDR’s suggested resources to evaluate how a single curriculum could be universally applied to residency programs.

Currently, many resources are available that aim to teach the skills and knowledge required to become savvy in the topics comprising health care economics as they relate to radiology. One of the most popular of these resources is the Business of Radiology online video lecture series by David Yousem [14]. Although learning the information on the videos would certainly fulfill the milestone

**Table 2.** The health care economics milestones, matched with each milestone-level definition, adapted from The Diagnostic Radiology Milestone Project [3] and the Association of Program Directors in Radiology [9]

Level	Milestone Definition	SBP2: Health Care Economics
1	The resident demonstrates milestones expected of one who has had some education in diagnostic radiology.	Describes the mechanisms for reimbursement, including types of payers
2	The resident is advancing and demonstrating additional milestones.	States relative cost of common procedures
3	The resident continues to advance and demonstrate additional milestones; the resident consistently demonstrates the majority of milestones targeted for radiology.	Describes the technical and professional components of imaging costs
4	The resident has advanced so that he or she now substantially demonstrates the milestones targeted for residency. This level is designed as the graduation target.	Describes measurements of productivity (eg, relative value units)
5	The resident has advanced beyond performance targets set for residency and is demonstrating “aspirational” goals, which might describe the performance of someone who has been in practice for several years. It is expected that only a few exceptional residents will reach this goal.	Describes the radiology revenue cycle

Note: SBP = systems-based practice.

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