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A Voice in Your Ear: Podcasts as a Strategy to Support Successful Student Transition into Medical Education

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Background

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) School of Medicine (SOM) welcomed their first student cohort in July 2016 (Class of 2020). In July 2017, the SOM will matriculate their second cohort (Class of 2021). To organize information and advice from the Class of 2020 to the Class of 2021 in an innovative and practical manner, a series of student-created podcasts is being developed to deliver their "words of wisdom."

A key aim of this project is to share what the SOM's inaugural first class "wished they had known," to help future students adapt to medical school and navigate the intricate roadmap of undergraduate medical education.

It is anticipated that this initiative will establish a connection between SOM student cohorts, empower student leaders in peer mentoring, and positively impact the 2017 incoming cohort's first-year SOM experience. The project is sustainable; it has the support of administration and will likely become a legacy effort, extended to future incoming first-year cohorts, including the SOM's residents.

Program/Challenge Description

Transitioning to medical school is intrinsically challenging; being at a new medical school adds additional complications. These podcasts will contribute to the pre-matriculation and orientation programming to facilitate the preparation for and assimilation of students into medical school. The podcasts will capture student interviews and conversations with SOM faculty, administration, and fellow students. Topics will range from adapting to the border culture of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, preparing for USMLE Step examinations, utilizing available resources, and applying to residency. Listening to these podcasts will be voluntary although highly encouraged.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation of the podcast initiative will involve original research, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative measures, in a combination of online surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, for data collection as benchmark measures and periodic follow-up evaluation of outcomes. The planned study will investigate and document how messages that are communicated via podcast technology affect student attitudes, opinions and, potentially, academic performance as students transition into a newly-established undergraduate medical degree program. Other aspects of the study will also explore medical student experiences

transitioning into residency. Additionally, program assessment can examine user information (e.g., ease of use) and inform future pre-matriculation and orientation approaches (e.g., content modification, scheduled activities). Baseline data regarding students' attitudes, goals, and expectations will be collected during the Class of 2021's orientation (July 2017) so the podcasts' effectiveness can be measured at several time points throughout the academic year.

Discussion

Emphasis is placed on podcast content being student-created to ensure the podcasts do not have an obligatory or compulsory overtone; otherwise, the usefulness of the podcasts might be compromised. Encouraging as many students and faculty as possible to contribute to the podcast project is also considered to be imperative to provide a wide range of perspectives and input, reduce redundancy and establish a pipeline of future content creators and student consumers.