

PATIENT PARTNERS PROGRAM: A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

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First-hand experience

The recent Patient Partners Program held on November 29, 2024, provided an exceptional learning opportunity for medical students, focusing on real-life experiences of patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) and Psoriatic Arthritis (PsA). With a hands-on and immersive approach, students engaged directly with nine trained patient partners who shared their journeys and allowed students to practice critical examination skills.

The workshop, aptly themed "The Patient is the Best Teacher," emphasized the value of learning directly from patients. Patient partners served as invaluable teachers, demonstrating rapid musculoskeletal physical examination techniques and providing a glimpse into the daily challenges of living with chronic inflammatory arthritis.



Activities: Hands-On Musculoskeletal Exams

The program was divided into two workshops, each tailored to highlight specific aspects of arthritis care. Students rotated through stations, practicing musculoskeletal physical exams on patient partners with either RA or PsA. Patient partners actively participated, helping students locate swollen joints, assess range of motion, and identify deformities caused by the disease.

This unique format created an interactive and collaborative environment where students learned not only examination techniques but also how to communicate empathetically and respectfully with patients. By sharing their respective cases, the patient partners provided valuable perspectives on diagnosis, treatment, and coping strategies, making the experience both personal and memorable.



The Patient Perspective: Teaching Through Experience

The presence of patient partners allowed students to go beyond textbook knowledge. For many participants, hearing first-hand accounts of the struggles, triumphs, and day-to-day realities of arthritis left a lasting impact. Patients spoke candidly about symptoms like joint pain, fatigue, and stiffness, but also about their journeys toward resilience.

One student remarked, “Dealing and learning from patients who have lived with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) their entire lives is a humbling and enlightening experience that offers lessons regarding resilience, adaptability, and the need for these people to endure regardless of their limitations.”

Another participant added, “Seeing firsthand the conditions we’ve only studied in textbooks made me realize that these illnesses are the daily reality for many people. This experience has inspired me to strive harder to become someone who can help them navigate their journey and offer a chance to live life with as little pain as possible.”

The program also highlighted the importance of patient education and empowerment. By participating in the workshop, patient partners demonstrated the value of becoming active collaborators in healthcare, both as advocates for their conditions and as teachers to future physicians.



A Transformative Experience for Students

The feedback from students overwhelmingly pointed to the transformative nature of the workshop. Interacting with actual patients allowed them to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and clinical application. They gained not only technical skills but also a deeper appreciation for the human side of medicine.

One student summarized it perfectly: “I really hope that this program is continued because not only does it impart knowledge for all us students, it also instilled values such as empathy, kindness and humility.”



A Lasting Impact

The Patient Partners Program proved to be a powerful educational initiative, reinforcing the principle that patients play a pivotal role in shaping medical education. By sharing their experiences and enabling hands-on learning, the patient partners offered invaluable lessons that will resonate with future doctors throughout their careers.

Through this program, students learned that listening to patients is just as important as examining them, and that empathy combined with skill creates the foundation of excellent patient care.