

Targeted Curriculum Improves Knowledge and Confidence in Caring for Patients Under Guardianship

Shannon Clare, Caroline Vitale MD, Alethia Battles MSW, JD, Kahli Zietlow, MD

INTRO

Persons living with dementia (PLWD) who are unrepresented (i.e. are without a surrogate and without advance directives) are at risk of being appointed a legal guardian for decision-making. Guardianship severely restricts autonomy, and concerns exist due to documented cases of exploitation and/or abuse.

METHODS

1. Understand current physician training on surrogate decision-making and guardianship.
2. Create a 90 minute curriculum for house officers to train them on guardianship.
3. Assess knowledge acquisition and attitudes towards caring for PWLD.

RESULTS

Knowledge Assessment

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	P-value
Respondents (N)	66	41	
Mean Score (N)	4.5	7.2	
Mean Score (%)	41%	65%	
St Dev	2.0	1.9	
T-Test (unpaired)			<0.001

Financial Disclosures: KZ receives funding support from Health Services and Services Administration (GACA Award Grant # 1-K01HP49055-01-00)

After a targeted seminar on guardianship, knowledge assessment scores significantly improved. Respondents felt more comfortable managing care for PLWD and counseling their families about guardianship and its alternatives.

Select trainee quotes from post rotation survey:

“I liked that the lecture had a lot of practical implications that we can easily apply to future scenarios when dealing with capacity assessments and possible need for [a] guardian.”

“[A strength of this talk was] laying out the various issues that we can actually address as physicians and what is outside our control.”

“A great introduction to a topic we get almost no other exposure to but impacts many of the patients we see.”



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Curricular Components

Case Presentation

- Complex case of a geriatric patient with an apparent lack of decisional capacity.

Capacity Assessments

- Components of capacity assessment and distinction from cognitive assessment

Surrogate Decision Making

- Principles of surrogate decision-making, including ethics of substituted judgement
- Overview of advanced directives, power of attorney

Guardianship

- Types
- Requirements
- Legal Elements
- Misconceptions

Elder Abuse

- Limitations on autonomy
- Difficulty of reversal
- Lack of oversight and national uniformity

DISCUSSION

A targeted curriculum can improve clinician knowledge and self-perceived confidence in caring for PLWD, addressing a critical gap in physician training. In turn, this may help to protect vulnerable older adults.