Clerkship Learning Goals and Objectives: Primary Care

HISTORY TAKING: obtain accurate, efficient, appropriate, and thorough history.
This clerkship will focus on development of skills in eliciting an appropriately focused history in the office setting and performing a physical exam tailored to each patient’s presenting concerns. Students will learn to use the history to guide their physical exam, and to focus their approach in order to address the specific acute or chronic conditions encountered with each patient. Students will also learn to incorporate history and physical exam components that are recommended for screening and prevention in patients of various ages.

PHYSICAL EXAM: perform and interpret findings of a complete and organ-specific exam.
This clerkship will focus on refinement of physical exam skills in the outpatient setting, with particular emphasis on tailoring the physical exam to specific presenting problems. This clerkship will also emphasize the development of more advanced skills in specific components of the physical exam that may be more readily learned in the outpatient setting, including thyroid exam, breast exam, musculoskeletal exam, and genitourinary exam. Students will also learn to perform an age-appropriate screening physical exam.

PROCEDURES: perform routine technical procedures.
When relevant to the care of a patient seen in the office, students will learn to perform primary care office-based procedures, such as throat culture, Pap smear, STD cultures and microscopic examination, immunizations, suture removal, joint injection/aspiration.

DIAGNOSIS I: articulate a cogent, prioritized differential diagnosis based on initial history and exam. DIAGNOSIS II: design a diagnostic strategy to narrow an initial differential diagnosis, demonstrating knowledge of pathophysiology and evidence from the literature.
This clerkship focuses on skills in the initial evaluation of symptoms and chronic illnesses that commonly present in the primary care setting. Students will learn to use the initial history and physical exam to articulate a cogent, prioritized differential diagnosis that provides the framework for appropriate and selective diagnostic testing. Students will also be expected to design a rational diagnostic strategy, based on knowledge of pathophysiology, as well as evidence from the literature, to narrow an initial differential diagnosis. The longitudinal nature of the PCC additionally affords students the opportunity to follow through on the stepwise evaluation and management of a presenting symptom or chronic illness in the stable ambulatory patient.

MANAGEMENT: design a management strategy for life-threatening, acute, and chronic conditions demonstrating knowledge of pathophysiology and evidence from the literature.
The PCC will focus on the development of management skills for common acute and chronic illnesses seen in the primary care setting. Students will learn to apply knowledge of relevant pathophysiology and evidence-based data in the design of a management plan for common acute illnesses and chronic conditions. Students will also learn to consider risks, costs, and efficacy in treatment options, and will become familiar with determining when a medical problem requires hospitalization for safe management. Students will learn to recognize causes of treatment failure, including non-adherence and adverse effects of medications. Students will learn to counsel patients about their illness and treatment and to include patients in the decision-making process.
PREVENTION: plan a strategy for reducing incidence, prevalence, and impact of disease demonstrating knowledge of pathophysiology, clinical epidemiology, and evidence from the literature. This clerkship will emphasize prevention of illness and promotion of health in patients presenting in the primary care setting. Students will learn to counsel patients regarding appropriate preventive care recommendations, based on the patient’s age, gender, and family history, with particular attention to immunizations and age-appropriate screening for cancer, cardiovascular risk, and safety.

DATA ANALYSIS: interpret data from laboratories and radiology demonstrating knowledge of pathophysiology and evidence from the literature. This clerkship will emphasize the interpretation of common tests performed in the primary care setting, including blood tests, growth charts, and radiologic studies. Students will become familiar with the sensitivity, specificity, and predictive value of common tests used in primary care. Students will understand the difference between a screening test and a diagnostic test, and will learn to use pre-test probability in deciding on the utility of a specific test in a given clinical context. Students will also become familiar with the costs of tests and procedures, and with the management of abnormal results and incidental findings.

COMMUNICATION I: present patient information concisely, accurately, and in timely fashion to members of a health care team in a variety of settings and formats including verbally and in writing. This clerkship will emphasize concise and focused verbal and written presentation of relevant data in the context of primary care office practice. Students will present each patient to their preceptor, with particular attention to differential diagnosis and the formulation of the assessment and plan. Students will learn to write concise, timely and accurate outpatient office visit notes, including subjective and objective data, as well as an assessment and plan. Students will have the opportunity to communicate with a variety of health care providers, including members of the staff within the primary care office in the course of day-to-day coordination of patient care. Students may also have the opportunity to communicate with consultants and adjunctive providers outside the primary care office with regard to the shared management of patients.

COMMUNICATION II: keep patient and family involved and informed. This clerkship will emphasize the development of advanced skills in communication with patients and families, with particular attention to counseling and shared decision-making. Students will learn to educate patients and families about potential diagnoses, planned evaluation, treatment plans, test results, the proper use of medications, and treatment side effects, while demonstrating empathy, compassion, and respect for patient values. Students will be expected to assess patient understanding of evaluation and treatment recommendations, while taking into account educational background, language, health literacy, mental or physical impairments, and economic means.
PROFESSIONALISM I: be selfless, reliable, honest, and respectful of patients, colleagues and staff.

This clerkship is unique among HMS clinical courses in offering the student direct observation and instruction by an individual faculty member weekly over an eight month period. This allows the time for observation, reflection and growth to occur within the student, nurturing professionalism in a non-threatening environment. Students will be expected to demonstrate the humanistic values of honesty, integrity, compassion, altruism, and respect for oneself and others (including patients and coworkers). Students will demonstrate the required attendance, punctuality and skills of time management and will be well-groomed and appropriately attired. Students will be sensitive to patient needs, including being non-judgmental and respecting patient confidentiality.

PROFESSIONALISM II: take initiative and responsibility for learning, achieving personal growth and improvement, and supporting the learning objectives of others.

This clerkship will emphasize self-directed learning and the evidence-based practice of medicine. Students will be expected to exhibit a commitment to ongoing self-education and to seek opportunities to deepen their clinical and factual knowledge. Students will be encouraged to read about their patients and will be expected to analyze the medical literature to guide decision-making in the course of patient care. Students should seek regular feedback from their preceptor and demonstrate personal openness to change.

PROFESSIONALISM III: demonstrate knowledge and affirmation of ethical standards.

Students will be expected to demonstrate high ethical and moral standards, including sensitivity to the needs of patients and staff within the practice. Students will be expected to respect patient confidentiality, to counsel patients regarding treatment recommendations in language patients can understand, to include patients in the decision-making process, and to advocate for patients with limited resources or limited ability to advocate for themselves.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE: utilize understanding of cultural, socioeconomic, gender, and age – related issues in patient interactions and clinical decision making.

This clerkship will emphasize the importance of understanding the cultural context in which patients experience both illness and health. Students will interview patients while demonstrating sensitivity to the cultural, socioeconomic, gender and age issues that affect each patient’s perspective of his/her health. Students will learn to design management plans through a process of shared decision-making with each patient, incorporating the patient’s perspective into therapeutic plans. Students will learn to critically analyze relevant research, with attention to both research design and limitations of generalizability resulting from the scope of populations studied. Students will be encouraged to understand documented disparities in health care related to specific diseases and to consider ways to avoid perpetuating this disparity.
CAREERS IN MEDICINE: learn how your interests, strengths and weaknesses are suited to different fields.
The PCC offers the opportunity to broaden student perspectives in making career decisions by providing a deeper understanding of the organization, delivery and economics of health care in general, and primary care specifically. Students have the unique opportunity to develop longitudinal relationships with patients, providing insight into this important aspect of clinical care. In addition, students spend 8 months working directly with an experienced faculty clinician, who can serve as a role model and mentor in considering how specific career paths unfold beyond residency training. Students are also able to observe how other specialties and consultants interact with primary care clinicians, gaining a broader view of the various career choices available.

MODELS OF HEALTH CARE DELIVERY: understand various models of organizing, financing, and delivering health care.
This clerkship provides students the opportunity to work longitudinally with a primary care physician to recognize the influence of insurance status and health care system complexity on the ability of patients to obtain recommended care. Students also have the opportunity over the 8-month clerkship to become part of the health care team within a primary care office, thereby developing a better understanding of how multiple providers within and beyond the primary care office interact to provide comprehensive care for each patient.

HMS PCE Policies and Resources:

PCE Log Requirement: Students are required to record their encounter with each log topic once, inclusive of the highest level of patient interaction displayed in that encounter during the rotation. Individual clerkship directors may choose to use the PCE Log for additional purposes, so long as students meet the minimum requirement of recording the highest level of encounter with each one of the specified topics.

HMS Policy on Mistreatment: Harvard Medical School and its affiliated hospitals are committed to a culture of mutual respect and trust and to providing an environment free from discrimination, sexual harassment, unprofessional relationships, and abuses of authority. We take student mistreatment seriously and aspire to a culture of zero tolerance for instances of abuse, mistreatment, and disrespect. All faculty, students, house officers, fellows, and staff are expected to contribute to sustaining an environment of collegiality and mutual support that is conducive to learning and working. Students experiencing mistreatment personally or witnessing such behavior in others are expected to report such incidents in clerkship surveys and/or through a confidential online form accessible through the HMS Student Service site.

HMS Ombuds Office: As an impartial complaint handler, the Ombudsperson strives to see that people are treated fairly and equitably at Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Dental medicine and Harvard School of Public Health. The Ombudsperson is a designated neutral and, as such, does not advocate for any individual or point of view. The office is independent of any existing administrative or academic structures and is responsible only to the dean of each school. The office supplements the existing resources available to members of our communities. For more information go to http://www.hms.harvard.edu/ombuds/.