

New curriculum teaches patient-centric practices for 21st-century docs

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Medical students at Penn State are now receiving training in health systems sciences and patient navigation, along with the traditional areas of medical education.

The Penn State College of Medicine is one of 11 schools supported by the American Medical Association actively working to update the way future physicians learn their profession. Each school is developing its own new curriculum. In the fall of 2014, Jed Gonzalo, associate dean for [health systems](#) education, and colleagues, all at Penn State, developed and implemented the Systems Navigation Curriculum (SyNC), which shifts focus from learning only about the basic and clinical sciences to basic, clinical and health systems sciences, and also engages [students](#) as "patient navigators" during their first year of medical school.

"We need to help students learn the [health care](#) system," said Gonzalo, also assistant professor of medicine and public health sciences. "We are moving from a physician-centric to a patient-centric model—in most [medical education](#) curricula, students don't primarily learn about the [patients](#) themselves, the students mainly follow and observe the physicians in an apprenticeship model. By including patient navigation in their program, the students learn more directly about the patients."

A patient navigator acts as a liaison between patient and provider, helping patients navigate the health care system by educating them about medical issues, reducing delays in diagnosis and treatment, and helping to identify and remove impediments to care. Because this role can be

performed without a medical degree, first-year medical students are in a prime position to serve as patient navigators, gaining first-hand experience in the health care system while doing so.

"We believe patient navigation provides students with a participatory role in providing value to the health care system in a way that parallels and enhances traditional clinical experiences," wrote Gonzalo and colleagues in an *Academic Medicine* paper online today (Oct. 21).

The researchers emphasize the importance of educating doctors-to-be and practicing physicians, as well as other [health care providers](#), in health systems science moving forward.

"We are shifting from looking at an acute episode to looking at the whole, and helping the patient to live a better life," said Gonzalo.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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