

Touring senior centers, interacting with residents positively impacts health students

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A new study has found that a community-based service learning experience involving greater interaction with older adults had a positive impact on career development for medical residents (physicians who have graduated from medical school and are starting work at a healthcare facility under supervision). Researchers who designed the program published their findings in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

Eighty third-year Internal Medicine residents at the University of Pennsylvania participated in the study; 71 residents completed follow-up surveys. As part of the program, medical residents engaged in several different activities at residential facilities serving older adults:

- Participants toured the building or center, including apartments, and learned about the facility's purpose, operations, and diverse community of [older men](#) and women.
- Participants attended brief presentations about local community resources available to older adults.
- Participants delivered a 45-60 minute presentations on healthcare topics for older adults at the facility. Presentations covered cancer screenings and preventive healthcare for heart disease and strokes, as well as diabetes, arthritis, hypertension, dementia, and depression.

The researchers set specific goals for the medical residents, including:

- Increasing their awareness of community resources that support

older adults.

- Broadening their knowledge of clinical topics in geriatrics.
- Improving their communication skills when working with older men and women.

Following their experience, the medical residents filled out a survey. Based on the results, most residents said that the tour was informative, and that they valued the facts they learned about the facility and what it offered. Most of the residents said that the experience increased their ability to communicate effectively with older adults, boosted their knowledge of resources and community living, and expanded their knowledge of health topics important to older people.

Most residents also strongly agreed that the experience contributed to their capacity to care for older adults.

The residents said that the service learning program helped them appreciate older adults' concerns, and increased awareness of the health literacy barriers that many older adults face. What's more, the residents said that the program introduced them to the environment and social context that impacts older adult care.

When asked about the most interesting part of their experience, many residents noted they appreciated the opportunity to interact with older [adults](#) outside a hospital setting. They reported benefitting from learning how to communicate health information to older men and women, and learning how [older adults](#) understand common conditions and concerns.

Medical residents suggested that these community-based service learning programs could be conducted earlier in healthcare professional training, perhaps during internships before someone graduates from school. Program participants also suggested that service learning could be offered more frequently, and that perhaps several different levels of

older adult care could be included.

More information: Rachel K. Miller et al, Effect of a Community-Based Service Learning Experience in Geriatrics on Internal Medicine Residents and Community Participants, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.14968](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.14968)

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