

# Introduction to Geriatrics for First-Year Medical Students

at Emory University School of Medicine



## SUMMARY

### Target Audience

All first-year medical students

### Purpose

To expose students to people over age 80 who are functionally independent and aging successfully

### Program

A four-hour experiential session at a residential setting for aging adults

### History

The program started in February 2004

### Operating Costs

Dinners with older adult "senior teaching associates"; faculty time for a nurse gerontologist and geriatric medicine fellow

### Outcomes

Since the start of the program, student geriatric electives have increased ten-fold

### Available Materials

Program manual, including session agendas, facilitator's guide, and evaluation forms

### For More Information

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## Program Overview

In the course of their clinical training, medical students are often confronted with older adults who are frail and sick, rather than functional. This may lead to negative stereotypes and unfortunate preconceptions when students interact with older patients.

The goal of the Introduction to Geriatrics Program is to expose all first-year medical students to people over age 80 who are functionally independent and aging successfully. All first-year medical students are required to participate in this four-hour program, which allows them to interact with healthy older people early in their training, prior to clinical experiences where students are more likely to encounter older people who are ill. This experience better prepares students for the diversity of the older population.

The session is designed to:

- orient students to levels of care and services provided at the Wesley Woods Center on Aging at Emory, and to the Center facilities
- introduce students to transitions of care
- provide examples of the demographic imperative
- provide a supervised intergenerational educational experience for students in which they spend quality time with older people living independently
- provide opportunities for students to experience the world through the eyes of older adults.

The session was initially tested in 2002 with a small group of seven AFAR scholarship students. It was revised and expanded to include all 120 first-year medical students in February 2004, using Reynolds Foundation funding.



## **Program Operations**

All first-year medical students (110-112 per year) are introduced to geriatrics with a large group lecture on the Basics in Geriatrics (BIG) 10 Principles. These principles provide the theoretical framework for this session and differentiate the care of older patients from that of other patient populations. (Example: “Aging is not a disease”; most older adults are living independently and actively participating in the world around them; chronological age has very little to do with how we age.)

In the seven weeks following the large group lecture, 15 to 20 medical students per week visit the Emory Geriatric Center, a multilevel complex designed for older adults. All first-year students participate in the small-group sessions over the course of the seven weeks, which include an “aging simulation” of visual and functional barriers, using special eyeglasses and gloves; a tour of the Geriatric Center that offers multiple levels of care; an interactive discussion session with “Senior Teaching Associates” (healthy residents who are 80 to 100 years old); and dinner one-on-one with the Senior Teaching Associates. The interactive session with the Senior Teaching Associates focuses on “What I need from my health care system and my doctors.” Throughout the four-hour small-group sessions, related demographic data are introduced.

## **Staffing Requirements**

The program uses one nurse gerontologist faculty member and a Geriatric Medicine fellow. The Geriatric Medicine fellow serves as a resource for the simulated aging component of the program described above.

## **Program Costs and Funding Sources**

The small-group sessions require four hours of faculty time per session. The program pays for the cost of dinners with the “Senior Teaching Associates.” Five mini kits of simulated aging materials were initially

ordered from “The SECURE Project for Sensitivity Training” at a cost of \$150. The program was originally tested with an Emory funded Teaching Grant and expanded with funds from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation Aging and Quality of Life Program. Currently the program is supported through Department of Medicine funds, donations, and the CoE.

## **Process and Outcomes Data**

Student geriatric electives have increased ten-fold (from 1-2 to 12-20 electives/year) since the start of this program. Students are asked to fill out an evaluation at the end of the day’s session. Student ratings for this training session are very high. (See *Available Materials* for more session details and evaluation data.)

## **Implementation Lessons**

- This program can be replicated at any site that offers multiple levels of care for older adults and includes opportunities to interact with healthy older adults.
- Small groups of 15-20 students/session are more effective than larger groups.
- Ending the day with dinner often leads to additional interactions between students and older adults, such as return student visits, students providing musical entertainment, and/or student assistance at health fairs.

## **Available Materials**

### Tools/Resources

- 2007 Program Manual, including session agendas, a facilitator’s guide, and evaluation forms and data

### Website

- The SECURE Project for Sensitivity Training: [www.leememorial.org/shareclub/secure.asp](http://www.leememorial.org/shareclub/secure.asp)

### ***For More Information***

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This document is part of a compilation of approaches to geriatrics recruitment, career development, and programmatic expansion, based on the work of the John A. Hartford Foundation "Centers of Excellence in Geriatric Medicine and Training." For more information, visit [www.afar.org/recruitment](http://www.afar.org/recruitment) or [www.jhartfound.org](http://www.jhartfound.org).

