

# Integrated Four-Year Elective Geriatrics Track for Medical Students

at Baylor College of Medicine



## SUMMARY

### Target Audience

All medical students

### Purpose

To prepare students to provide professional care for older adults and to interest students in careers in geriatrics

### Program

A four-year elective program consisting of a variety of clinical and research experiences in geriatrics

### History

The Geriatrics Track was started in 2001 as an outgrowth of a longstanding Student Geriatrics Interest Group

### Operating Costs

Course director, nine additional faculty, and staff administrator; student research scholarships to attend American Geriatrics Society Annual Meeting

### Outcomes

During the first year, two students completed the track; in 2008, six to eight will complete all aspects of the track

### Available Materials

Geriatrics Skills Workshop syllabus and credit and grading system; Geriatrics Track website and timeline overview

### For More Information

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## Program Overview

In order to provide quality care for our nation's elderly population, all medical trainees need opportunities to learn about the unique aspects of geriatric care, under the guidance of geriatrics faculty and research mentors.

The Geriatrics Track for Medical Students was created in 2001 to prepare medical students to provide this care and to interest students in careers in geriatrics. The program aims to:

- increase students' knowledge base and sensitivity to the issues of aging adults
- introduce the principles of inpatient, outpatient, nursing home, and home care for older adults
- teach functional, social, cognitive, and physical assessment skills
- facilitate research activities and critical thinking.

The Geriatrics Track was developed in response to faculty and staff observations that first-year students who were enthusiastic participants in the Geriatrics Interest Group were being "lost" when they started their clinical rotations. As part of the four-year program, the Geriatrics Track provides beginning second-year students with hands-on clinical experiences, an attractive feature for students who are eager to begin working with patients.

## Program Operations

The Geriatrics Track includes various preclinical and clinical electives for students interested in learning more about the care of older adults. Students participate in patient care in a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings. Faculty mentors work with students throughout the four-year program, which includes the design and completion of a clinical or basic sciences research project.



Students who complete the Geriatrics Track receive a Certificate of Educational Achievement in Geriatrics and a letter of accommodation in the medical school file. All students are welcome to elect any of the Geriatrics Track components without having completed previous Track courses.

The Geriatrics Track consists of the following components:

***Year 1: The Texas Geriatrics Interest Foundation (TGIF)***

Students are introduced to geriatrics and gerontology through a joint University of Texas School of Medicine and Baylor College of Medicine student interest group. Monthly activities include didactic lunch conferences, panel discussions, social activities with geriatric medicine faculty, and community service experiences with agencies that support seniors. All students, in any year, are welcome to attend.

***Year 2: Aging-related Themes and Geriatric Skills Courses***

**Aging-related Themes Course:** During the Fall of Year 2, all Baylor medical students receive 10 hours of lecture on the Physiology of Aging, given by faculty from the Baylor Huffington Center on Aging.

In addition, a preclinical elective, the Geriatric Skills Workshop, offers eight 90-minute evening sessions providing hands-on training in the assessment of older adults. Workshop topics include:

- sensory assessment, including sensitivity training with impaired vision eyeglasses and other tools
- gait and balance assessment
- physical, occupational, and speech therapy
- use of common medical devices
- mental status evaluation
- history and physical exam skills
- wound care – assessment and treatment
- communicating with older people
- breaking bad news
- care for the dying patient.

**Year 3:** All Baylor medical students participate in a one-year Longitudinal Ambulatory Care Experience (LACE) one afternoon a week. For students participating in the Geriatrics Track, the LACE requirement can be fulfilled by participation in the GeriHomes Track, in which medicine and care coordination is taught through two home visit programs consisting of house calls in homes, assisted living communities, and nursing homes. Students also visit adult day centers, hospices, and other community agencies for older adults. A project to improve the home visit program or community it serves is required at the end of the year. Participation in the GeriHome Track is by application, with space for 6 students per year.

***Year 3-4: Geriatrics Clinical and Research Rotations***

During the third or fourth year, students in the Geriatrics Track participate in a 4-week geriatrics clinical care rotation in a hospital setting.

Students also conduct a clinical or basic sciences research project that will have a positive impact on the care of seniors. A research faculty mentor helps students develop the research question, design a study, collect data, and analyze the results. Competitive scholarships are available for travel to the American Geriatrics Society (AGS) Annual Meeting to present the research project.

***Staffing Requirements***

A Huffington Center on Aging faculty member serves as the Geriatrics Track director, and nine additional faculty support the clinical and research experiences in the Geriatrics Track.

Geriatrics fellows play an additional teaching role; for example, significant responsibility was given to one second-year fellow whose research focused on educational issues. The Geriatrics Track requires about 25% time for an administrative staff person.



### **Program Costs and Funding Sources**

In addition to faculty and administrative staff time, program costs include student scholarships to attend the AGS Annual Meeting and costs of the geriatrics skills course, which can reach \$1,500. Research support for each student is about \$2,000, and up to three students are supported every year.

This program is supported by the Hartford Center of Excellence grant with minimal supplemental funds from the institution.

### **Process and Outcomes Data**

During the first year, two students completed the track. In 2008, six to eight will complete all the aspects of the track.

At least two of the students that have passed through this program have reported that they will become geriatricians.

A similar Geriatric Skills course is in progress at Saint Louis University, indicating that this approach has “traction.”

### **Implementation Lessons**

- The biggest challenge is marketing: being present at “club” events where all student activity groups enroll members, and using other student venues.
- Another challenge is letting the students choose the topics for Student Chapter noon conferences.
- After implementing the program, it was shown that there are no advantages to excluding those who do not want to participate in the entire track.
- The administrative and logistical burden is significant, especially because the students tend to do everything “at the last minute.”

### **Available Materials**

#### Tools/Resources

- Geriatrics Skills Workshop syllabus, including course goals and overview
- Geriatrics Track timeline overview

#### Website

- Geriatrics Track Homepage: [www.bcm.edu/osa/handbook/?PMID=6148](http://www.bcm.edu/osa/handbook/?PMID=6148)

### **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).