

Curriculum Reform Town Hall Q and A

by Col. (Dr.) Arnyce Pock and MC1 Chad Hallford

Q: Curriculum Reform appears to be involving some wide-sweeping changes. What major changes are being planned?

A: The curricular reform project involves virtually every aspect of the current School of Medicine curriculum. That said, the major changes can be divided into four key areas: Changes involving the Pre-Clerkship Period, the Clerkship Period, the Post-Clerkship Period & the Military Unique Curriculum. Included in the Post-Clerkship Period will be a phased-in opportunity for students to complete a CAPSTONE Project.

The chart [right] provides a brief synopsis of some of the main changes in each of these areas.

Q: At the January Town Hall meeting it was noted that School of Medicine students may be transitioning to a new grading system. If so, what will the new grading scheme look like and when will it be implemented?

A: Current plans are for a new grading scheme to be phased in, starting with the Class of '15. Instead of relying on traditional letter grades, the new plan proposes use of a three-tiered system with Honors, Pass or Fail. If approved, this would become the grading structure for all four years of the medical school curriculum.

Q: A great amount of work has already been completed in order to have the new curriculum ready for implementation in Fall 2011, but when will a more detailed layout of the new curriculum be available for review?

A: The first step was to realign and reorganize material taught during the first two years of medical school into a series of systems-based modules. That was completed in December and is currently available for viewing on the web.

The next phase, involves developing a more detailed, week-by-week plan

for the pre-clerkship curriculum, with a corresponding set of weekly educational goals. This phase is expected to be completed by 15 March.

The final phase involves establishing teaching objectives for each educational session and/or lecture. This will be done in close collaboration with course directors, course-specific instructors, and the corresponding module directors. This phase is expected to be completed by 15 June and will provide individual instructors with a fair degree of precision about the day/date when they will be asked to deliver a lecture, lead a small group, or participate in some other form of educational activity.

Q: How involved are current USU students in this process? Do students have a voice in how the curriculum evolves?

A: Current USU School of Medicine students have been integrally involved in all phases of developing the new curriculum. Each of the four main planning committees (Pre-Clerkship, Clerkship, Post-Clerkship & Assessment) have students assigned as full-fledged members, as does the Curriculum Reform Advisory Committee.

In addition, we now have student members aligned to each of the seven modules that comprise the pre-clerkship period. These students will be actively involved in helping to review the emerging modular curricula, and in ensuring that the right topics are introduced at the right time, in the right sequence and via the most effective modality. For example, depending on the specific topic, material might be presented via any combination of small and/or large group teaching, use of the Sim Center, interactions with actual patients, lab experiences, virtual cases, field exercises, and/or self-study techniques.

Highlights of the New Curriculum

Pre-Clerkship Period

- Shortened from two years to approx. 16 months. Allows rotations to start earlier, which provides more time for tailored, MS-IV electives. Also provides more time for "audition rotations" at potential internship/residency sites.
- Change from a traditional, course-based form of pre-clinical instruction to one that is fully integrated and divided into seven different system-based modules.
- Increased use of case-based learning, with more teaching being done in small groups vs. large lecture halls.

Core-Clerkships

- Divided into three 16-week segments; each containing two related disciplines, plus a week of combined assessment.
- Goal is for Class of '15 students to complete at least one of their three clinical blocks in the same geographic (or regional) area for improved clinical continuity.
- Deliberate "threading" of basic science through clerkships, reinforcing previous concepts & introducing new material, as it relates to students' clinical experiences.

Post-Clerkship Period

- Re-position the Step I exam to a period shortly after completion of the core clerkships.
- Introduce a "Bench to Bedside and Beyond" unit after the core clerkships: Integrates advanced science at a point when students can more fully appreciate the clinical relevance.

Military Unique Curriculum

- Updated and integrated throughout all four years of the curriculum.
- Expanded field exercise (Bushmaster) that incorporates active interaction between the MS-I, MS-II, & MS-IV classes along with members of the Graduate School of Nursing. Allow MS-Is to experience a much earlier immersion into the world of operational medicine, in October of their first year.

Capstone Project

- Includes provisions for a "Capstone Project." While this might be initiated prior to the MS-IV year, the goal is to provide students with an opportunity to design, conduct, analyze and present a research topic of their choosing, via the guidance of a faculty mentor.

Additional information about USU's Curriculum Reform is available at: www.usuhs.mil/curriculumreform. Additionally, a bulletin board can be found in the cafeteria (near the microwaves) that features some related charts and graphs. Any comments or suggestions are welcome and can be directed to Arnyce.pock@usuhs.mil or office E-2033).