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PARO PERSPECTIVE
OPTIMIZING THE VIRTUAL CARE CURRICULUM

Background: Virtual Care in Medical Education

PARO champions the issues that create conditions for Residents to be their best and ensure optimal patient care. We advocate for optimal training where Residents feel confident to succeed and competent to achieve excellence in patient care and optimal working conditions where Residents enjoy working and learning in a safe, respectful and healthy environment.

Effective training in delivering virtual care is key to every Resident's success. PARO champions the development of standards in virtual care so residents can confidently and competently provide excellent care in a virtual environment. We recognize that virtual care will be part of patient care moving forward, and PARO has considered how training can be to be optimized to prepare Residents for this future.

This perspective uses the CPSO Policy language that defines virtual care as "any interaction between patients and/or members of their circle of care that occurs remotely, using any form of communication or information technology, including telephone, video conferencing and digital messaging with the aim of facilitating or providing patient care."

Considering Virtual Care Training Beyond COVID

It is important to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic created unique challenges that accelerated how virtual care was delivered. As a result, the processes and infrastructure created by the medical education and healthcare systems during this time may not be ideally designed due to the urgent need to respond to the pandemic. We believe some of this work will need to evolve in order to create an optimal training and working environment.

As the implementation of virtual care progresses, we anticipate that this document and perspective will evolve. PARO's goal is to share the resident experience and work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure high-quality learning experiences and optimal patient care.

The Resident Experience: Providing Virtual Care During COVID

Residents can play a valuable role in the development and implementation of virtual care curriculum by providing their perspective as front-line healthcare providers on the challenges and opportunities that arise for both learning and patient care. We believe there is an opportunity to optimally integrate virtual care into the medical education landscape and enhance training. Over the last year, we have gathered feedback from Residents regarding their experience training and working virtually.

Environmental Scan

Overall, the feedback PARO collected from our members revealed variation in the experience and impact of increased use of virtual care; while some residents felt the transition to providing care virtually had been relatively smooth, others reported more challenges. While the feedback collected cannot reflect every experience, we did identify several key themes that emerged across training programs and universities.

Current Challenges

Training Consistency:
Residents report variability in the virtual care training they receive based on their specialty, staff approach and practice site. A consistent approach to virtual care standards and technology was highlighted as a way to significantly improve the effectiveness of training. Residents should be included in the provision of virtual care in settings where they would have received training had they been in person. Programs may wish to consider how to ensure that exposure to performing physical exams is consistent between training locations.

Institutional Support:
A common theme is the variable level of support Residents receive from their preceptors. Additional technical training and support, as well as access to private workstations was highlighted as an existing gap.

Logistical Limitations:

Residents lack confidence that education standards are being maintained, given the variability of virtual care training between residency training programs. Residents report that it is more difficult to build the doctor-patient relationship and that work may be duplicated with virtual and in-person appointments. Safety, security, and liability issues are a significant concern for Residents when providing virtual care.

New Opportunities and Successes

Increased Efficiency for Patients:

Residents talked about how, in some cases, the virtual environment has improved the efficiency of delivering care to their patients. Shorter wait times for appointments, improved patient attendance, and access for patients and their families are a few of the benefits. In some cases, multi-disciplinary care is streamlined as more team members can attend virtual patient meetings. Normalizing the practice of patients reaching out to their medical team for support was mentioned as a potential benefit.

New training opportunities for Residents:

Residents report that they learn new skills when providing virtual care, such as how to triage a sick patient who requires an in-person exam. Residents feel they are able to build confidence to practice more independently. In some cases, there are more opportunities for direct observation and feedback by staff. Residents noted increased efficiences around taking patient notes, seeking opinions of specialists, and the ability to see more patients in a day.

PARO's Vision of Success For Training in Virtual Care

With the development of a virtual care curriculum, along with new policies and infrastructure, medical educators are provided with an opportunity to optimize training and working conditions for Residents. There will naturally be some variances in approach based on location and discipline. Nonetheless, PARO believes that minimum standards are essential to ensure a consistent level of competence.

1. An articulated standard of care for virtual scenarios

- It is crucial that Residents understand when the delivery of virtual care is appropriate and conversely, when it is not and how to manage the situation. PARO recommends that training delivery specifically address these scenarios.

- Residents and programs will benefit from the establishment of clear standards for technology and infrastructure, as well as policies that can ensure safe, resident-led virtual care.

- Clear and consistent policies and procedures around privacy and legal requirements will help ensure that Residents stay safe in the patient-physician relationship.

- Training programs are best-placed to establish specialty-specific best practices in virtual care, and identify strategies to train residents in these practices.

2. Seamless Integration into Training

- A seamless integration of virtual care into residency training is crucial to ensure that learning is prioritized.

- Specific virtual care training for those who supervise residents will help ensure consistent, high quality teaching. This may include preceptors, faculty and chief residents.

- Programs should seek to foster a training environment where virtual care training is supported by staff, and faculty members understand the gaps and opportunities presented by virtual care. We encourage a program-led discussion of how to manage the gaps based on the lived experience of Residents.

- Consideration should be given to what mechanisms and procedures can be used to most effectively track and measure learning and patient care outcomes.

3. Patient and Resident Safety

- Priority must be given to ensure that every Resident feels confident and competent providing virtual care.

- Programs should consider what supports are necessary to ensure that Residents are not exposed to safety and legal issues, and that residents understand how to establish appropriate patient-physician boundaries.

- Every Resident must be provided with the tools and physical space to properly deliver virtual care.

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