

Building Community Amongst Medical Educators: A Model for a Medical Education Journal Club

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Abstract

Community-building and professional development activities that create connections with medical schools are important for recruiting and retaining community-based faculty (Paul et al., 2020). The University of Colorado – School of Medicine (CUSOM) at Colorado State University (CSU) is a new community-based medical campus and, as such, our leadership team has been motivated to create early opportunities for educators connect to a larger community, connect with the medical school, and engage in professional development around medical instruction.

One professional development opportunity we created is a medical education journal club. Invitees to meetings include all CUSOM at CSU faculty (medical science faculty, longitudinal integrated clerkship liaisons, clinical year directors, and content directors), CUSOM at CSU administrators, and education specialists from local residency programs. Below, we share our model and research-based rationales for this program towards contributing to ongoing conversations on how to meaningfully engage medical educators in community-building and instructional improvement opportunities.

We found limited research on instructional change strategies specific to medical education, so we largely drew on instructional change research from undergraduate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education to inform our journal club design. In a critical review of nearly 200 articles on STEM instructional improvement initiatives, Henderson, Beach, and Finkelstein (2011) offer key takeaways on the effectiveness of different change strategies. They suggest that sharing curricular materials for faculty to “take up” and implementing “top-down” educational policies to influence educational practices are not effective methods for instructional change. Rather, effective strategies: a) seek to understand and change the teaching-related beliefs of educators; b) are long-term interventions (i.e., longer than one semester); and c) are designed to be compatible with the complex institutional system in which faculty work.

Considering this research, we designed the medical education journal club to elicit and attend to faculty teaching-related beliefs. Although EMA (the CUSOM at CSU Education Specialist) facilitates meeting discussions, attendees are encouraged to shape conversational directions with their questions, contributions, and instructional experiences. Faculty are also explicitly invited and encouraged to select journal club topics and readings. We also strive to foster a safe environment for earnest reflection, discussion, and learning by explicitly recognizing (and reminding each other) that teaching is complex and challenging (Aster, Bouwma-Gearhart, & Quardokus Fisher, 2021). Our intention with these design

decisions is to help educators bring real problems of practice to meetings and, in so doing, build on their existing knowledge bases.

Considering the importance of understanding the institutional system in which professional development opportunities are implemented (and designing them to fit within this system), we took steps prior to starting the journal club to understand how it could be structured to best attend to faculty realities. Specifically, EMA sent a survey to CUSOM at CSU faculty to assess their interest in a medical education journal club and preferences for meeting times, days, and frequencies. EMA also met with CUSOM at CSU administrators and curricular year directors to receive feedback on a journal club as a teaching professional development opportunity. These measures helped us learn that there were faculty interested in participating in a medical education journal club and that monthly meetings, over the lunch hour on Wednesdays, worked for most educators. We also learned that some faculty wanted in-person meetings while others wanted remote meetings, so we decided to alternate between in-person and remote (i.e., Zoom) meetings. In acknowledgement of busy faculty schedules and the decision to meet over the lunch hour, we decided to provide lunch at in-person meetings. Assessing needs and interests for this professional development opportunity prior to implementation, we believe, helped us garner faculty buy-in and intentionally design a recurring event that was accessible to most faculty.

Initial and informal feedback from journal club attendees has been positive. For example, one member recently thanked efforts to sustain the journal club because “there’s been really useful content!” The journal club has been attended by faculty from all curricular areas, with three administrators, eight clinical faculty, six medical science faculty, and three residency specialists attending at least one meeting. Thirteen members have attended two or more meetings, suggesting that these attendees in particular may find value in this event. We hope that sharing how research has guided our design for a journal club helps others engaged in similar efforts to build faculty community around teaching, especially as CUSOM’s longitudinal integrated clerkships implement strategies to recruit and involve more community-based clinical faculty. Future steps will include gathering empirical data to help us better understand faculty perspectives and takeaways from participating in journal club opportunities.

References

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