



University  
of  
Pittsburgh  
  
School  
of  
Medicine

# Practical Medical Conversations in Spanish

Fall 2009

Course Dates: October 27, November 10, 17, December 1, 8  
5 sessions on Tuesday evenings, 6:30—8:30 PM

Maximum Students: 8

Class Year: MS-2 (Class of 2012)

Prerequisite: Basic Spanish for Medical Students Mini-Elective

Course Directors: Alison Howells and John F. Mahoney, M.D.

Contact Information: Contact Ms. Howells via OMED  
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Description:

The principle underlying this elective is that students will most effectively improve their conversational skills by practicing speaking Spanish.

This 5 session mini-elective is designed to help you build on the introductory-level background in Spanish language elective that you participated in last summer. The sessions in this course will use those basics and apply them while improving your conversation skills.

The focus of the elective will be on conducting a problem-focused medical interview with a Spanish-speaking patient. Students will learn how to interview patients (in Spanish) about common medical conditions by practicing these conversations with native speakers. Beyond learning the vocabulary and sentence structure of these conversations, students will also learn and practice strategies to communicate with patients when the two parties cannot quite understand each other – a common problem for novices in any language.

During this initial program, this elective is being offered only to students who completed the Basic Spanish for Medical Students Mini-Elective during summer 2009. This elective may be opened to other students in the future.

Format:

The first classroom session will provide a refresher on the material covered during the introductory (summer) elective. The next four sessions are designed so that each student will spend a substantial portion of each session actively speaking with and listening to patient conversations in Spanish. The preparation for each session will include practicing the key questions about the topic or chief complaint of the session (e.g., chest pain, febrile infant, medication problem, etc.) and reviewing the vocabulary that a patient would most likely use to answer those questions. Concise preparatory materials will be provided ahead of time to keep preparation time to a minimum, but students should be aware that this preparation is absolutely essential for success in the conversation sessions.

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Students will work in pairs to interview a patient. These patients, many of whom are native-Spanish-speakers, will provide high-fidelity practice and practical feedback that will accelerate learning. This approach will help students become more comfortable with attempting to speak in Spanish with patients.

Course Directors:

Course director Alison Howells, is an experienced language educator. Dr. John Mahoney is an emergency physician with experience in developing curricula on patient-doctor communication. The curriculum for this elective was developed by the course directors to build upon the existing PittMed clinical skills and basic Spanish curricula.

Course Objectives:

- To practice basic conversation skills in Spanish, with a focus on common medical interviewing topics.
- To improve fluency in medical and general vocabulary in Spanish.

Requirements:

- Participate in all 5 course sessions.
- Complete out of class preparation, approximately 1 hour before each session.  
(Students who anticipate that they will not do this preparation should not enroll in this mini-elective.)

**Course Outline:**

**Practical Medical Conversations in Spanish**

October 27, November 10, 17, December 1, 8

Tuesday evenings, 6:30 p.m.—8:30 p.m.

Note: There is no course session during the weeks of the Pulmonary or GI course examinations .

**Course Requirements and Logistics:**

- Participate in all 5 course sessions.
- Complete out of class preparation, approximately 1 hour before each session.  
(Students who anticipate that they will not do this preparation should not enroll in this mini-elective.)

The brevity and rapid pace of the course are tailored to the schedule and learning style of second year students. This elective is not recommended for students who cannot commit to attending all 5 sessions or investing the out of class preparation effort. Like other mini-electives, this is a non-transcript elective, with no formal grade or transcript entry. Students who complete the elective will receive a certificate of completion.

Course materials will be provided to participants at the first course session. The Basic Spanish for Medical Students elective syllabus and a medical dictionary are key references.

**Location:**

Scaife Hall, Room 502

**Course Outline**

**Session 1 - October 27, 2009**

Fundamentals Review, including: Naming and Describing; Sentence Basics; Expressing Actions; Asking Questions; Giving Instructions; Numbers and Time; and Past vs. Present.

**Sessions 2 through 5—November 10, 17, December 1, 8, 2009**

The sessions are designed so that each student will spend a substantial portion of each session actively speaking with and listening to patient conversations in Spanish. Each session will begin with a brief demonstration of how a model problem-focused interview would be conducted. Pairs of students will then

practice that same interview with a Spanish-speaking patient. The student side of the interview will be based on a set of "scripted", problem-focused questions provided by the instructor.

Students will need to practice these questions before the classroom session. The patient's replies will be based on a limited vocabulary that students will also review in advance. Beyond simply memorizing the questions and answers, students will need to work with the patient to overcome any difficulties in understanding each other (in either direction). The patients and instructor will provide students with immediate feedback and opportunities for repeated practice.

Sample interview topics may include: febrile child, adult chest pain, arm laceration, infant well check, obstetrics prenatal visit, upper respiratory infection, post-operative follow-up, medication question, and weight loss.