A FOUR-YEAR COMPREHENSIVE CAREER AND ACADEMIC ADVISING SYSTEM

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Background: The University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine is a world-class educational and research institution that provides its medical students with a progressive, centralized, state-of-the-art curriculum, and numerous opportunities to explore ways to excel, including research, community service, and leadership experiences. The single greatest determinant of an institution’s success is its people, in this case the intelligent, creative, diverse student body, and the faculty with their varied interests and experiences.

Objective: To provide a full-spectrum career advising system that supplements and is synergistic with the strengths of the medical school. This program must provide support and direction for students as they define their specialty and career goals while also maintaining the flexibility to encourage students to maximize exposures and explore alternative options as they progress through their four years. It should allow some students to focus their interests early, and should also ensure individual attention for those students who may need continuing clarification of their decision-making process.

Methods: To complement the school’s existing resources devoted to personal and academic counseling, the Office of Student Affairs has organized a centralized network of services for the student body which includes weekly lunchtime workshops on career options, decision making, specialty choices, practice settings and enrichment opportunities; newsletters; student-run interest groups; and small group sessions. Each medical student is assigned a faculty advisor upon entering their first year, with the expectation that they work together to identify an appropriate mentor or mentors as their interests evolve. Evaluation of the career advising system looks at both frequency of contact with faculty as well as accomplishment of its specific goals.

Results: Students are increasingly active in using resources such as the Careers in Medicine website, AMA-FRIEDA, as well as the centralized programming. Post-workshop evaluations are positive, and students seem to self-select the manner in which they are most comfortable receiving this information. The results of the AAMC Graduation Questionnaire are consistently above average for the career counseling sections.

Discussion: A comprehensive career and academic advising program can be successful by integrating existing strengths within the school’s culture and facilitating contacts and information sharing between the faculty and student body from a centralized Student Affairs office, with a minimal expenditure of additional resources.