Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine

CQI CHRONICLE

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Improving the Student Experience: Highlights from the 2025 Surgery Clerkship Retreat

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Introduction: A Collaborative Effort to Enhance Surgical Education

On September 5, 2025, approximately 40 faculty, administrators, and clerkship leaders from across New Jersey gathered at Jersey Shore University Medical Center for the first annual HMSOM Surgery Clerkship Retreat. Facilitated by Dr. Ryan Moore, Director of the Surgery Clerkship, and Dr. Howard Ross, Chair of the Department of Surgery, the retreat's central goal was to collaboratively review and enhance the eight-week surgical rotation experience for medical students.

The attendees included site directors and preceptors who directly supervise students, alongside senior leadership from HMSOM, including Dr. Miriam Hoffman, Vice Dean of Academic Affairs; Dr. Laurie Sullivan, Senior Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Wellbeing; and Dr. Michael Giuliano, Associate Dean of Faculty, Resident, and Student Development.

Reaffirming the Mission: "We Are Still Making Doctors"

The retreat began by reaffirming the core purpose of the clerkship. As Dean Hoffman noted, "...we are still making doctors; we are not making specialists. The goal of every clerkship is to teach students the skills they need to be amazing doctors."

This philosophy guides the clerkship's structure, which is designed to teach foundational surgical skills applicable to any future medical specialty. Student progress is measured through Required Clinical Experiences (RCEs)—a set of essential procedures, presentations, and disease exposures—which align with the school's 18 Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs).

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The HMSOM AI Task Force: Leading the Way in Responsible Integration of Artificial Intelligence

Charles Binkley, MD, FACS, HEC-C

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming clinical medicine, healthcare operations, medical education, and basic and translational research. At Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM), we recognize both the promise and the responsibility that come with AI. In response, the School has established the AI Task Force to guide the ethical and impactful integration of AI across our community.

Mission and Purpose

The AI Task Force was established with a clear mission: to promote the responsible and ethical integration of AI and to ensure that students, faculty, and staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to utilize AI effectively in medical education, clinical practice, and research. The Task Force is committed to advancing innovation through curricular integration, faculty development, and research mentorship, while also safeguarding academic integrity, patient trust, and professional ethics.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

In many ways, the AI Task Force embodies the principles of continuous quality improvement. Just as CQI uses feedback and evaluation to refine the curriculum, the Task Force seeks input from students, faculty, and staff to shape its priorities. Stakeholders' perspectives are vital in ensuring that HMSOM's approach to AI reflects the needs and values of our school.

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Key Challenges Emerge from a Candid Discussion

The most animated discussions centered on feedback from both students and faculty, revealing shared challenges and opportunities for growth.

1. The Student Perspective: Data from the "Surgery Report Card," an anonymous student evaluation tool, provided critical insights. While students consistently gave high marks (90% or higher) to their educational experience with attending surgeons, their interactions with residents were an area for improvement. Areas of particular focus included the nature and quantity of constructive feedback from residents and clarity about evaluation and assessment.

This feedback highlighted ways to improve the learning environment and pointed to a need for better alignment between student expectations and the reality of their daily rotations.

2. The Faculty Perspective: A major point of discussion for faculty was the challenge of providing thoughtful student evaluations amidst demanding schedules. Surgeons described a time shortage while juggling clinical duties, teaching, and administrative tasks. Faculty discussed ways to make clinical evaluation more efficient and focused. The challenge of surgeons covering multiple sites was raised, and the solution of expanding the sites that students can go to, so that they can continue to work with the same attending was suggested and endorsed.

Dr. Ryan Moore, the Clerkship Director, echoed these challenges, noting the significant effort required to remind preceptors to complete and return clinical evaluations with meaningful comments. He and other leaders also underscored the importance of having more faculty participation in the Competency and Grading committee meetings, especially site directors and faculty who work frequently with HMSOM students.

Finding Solutions and a Path Forward

Despite the challenges, the retreat highlighted proactive solutions and a shared commitment to improvement and ensuring a positive learning environment at all surgery clerkship sites. Dr. Aziz Merchant, site director at JFK Medical Center, described how he uses orientation to ease student anxiety about completing RCEs. He explained how a single patient encounter can be leveraged to fulfill multiple requirements.

By the end of the discussion, there was a clear consensus: the current evaluation process can be improved. Attendees agreed to form a dedicated working group to develop recommendations for improving the student evaluation process, addressing the needs of both students and time-constrained faculty.

The retreat concluded with a brief overview of the student Sub-Internship experience, led by Dr. Samuel Sultan. (continued)

Improving the Student Experience: Highlights from the 2025 Surgery Clerkship Retreat (continued)

Reflecting on the collaborative spirit of the day, Dr. Howard Ross, Chair of the Department of Surgery, summarized the group's ultimate objective: “We all want to train good doctors in the end.”

The HMSOM AI Task Force: Leading the Way in Responsible Integration of Artificial Intelligence (continued)

Student Use of AI Tools

One of the central objectives of the AI Task Force is to prepare students for a future in which AI will be a routine part of medicine. Immediately relevant, students must know how to use AI tools responsibly in their education. The Task Force drafted the School of Medicine’s Generative AI Use Policy, which clarifies instances in which students should use the HMH approved Large Language Model (LLM), Ekam, when AI use must be cited, and when it is prohibited. This work empowers students to approach AI with both curiosity and responsibility.

Curricular Initiatives

As tomorrow’s physicians, HMSOM students must understand how to responsibly use AI tools in ways that enhance—rather than diminish—the patient–physician relationship. The Task Force is working closely with faculty to identify opportunities to introduce AI education into both pre-clinical courses and clerkships. These initiatives do not treat AI as a replacement for clinical judgment, but rather as a tool that complements and enhances human decision-making. It is essential that students not only understand how AI works but also how to critically evaluate its risks, benefits, and limitations.

Faculty and Staff Development

Equipping faculty and staff with the resources to teach and model responsible AI usage is another key goal. Several AI-related presentations will be included as part of the Faculty Development Series, aimed at building faculty and staff AI competency in AI-supported clinical decision making, generative AI use, and AI incorporation in pedagogy and research. Faculty must be able to understand basic AI concepts, integrate AI into their teaching, and exemplify the responsible use of AI clinically.

Looking Ahead

The integration of AI into medicine is not a distant prospect—it is here. As the work of the Task Force progresses, we look forward to sharing updates with the community and highlighting how feedback continues to guide our mission.

Please contact Marycarmen Kunicki at marycarmen.kunicki@hmsom.edu for additional information on topics included in this newsletter and if you would like to share the findings of any quality improvement projects with us for future publications.