Background & Purpose

- CanMEDS Health Advocate role difficult to define and teach
- Advocacy is a major activity of many grass-roots community organizations

Research Questions

- How does community see health advocacy and the role of physicians?
- How could community organizations be involved in training residents about health advocacy?

Methods

Focus groups with 19 representatives of community organizations serving:
- chronic illness
- disabilities
- women
- aboriginal health
- mental health

We asked:
- What are some examples of health advocacy that you have done?
- What skills are needed for health advocacy?
- How do you define health advocacy?
- What role should/could physicians play in health advocacy?
- What role could community organizations play in training physicians to be health advocates?


“...being that voice for those that can't and then empowering them to become their own voice.”

“...they need to know what the community has to offer in helping to solve problems and to communicate with services that are out there.”

Key Findings

Areas of health advocacy reported by:
- Community Organizations
- Residency Directors & Residents
- Advocates for personal patients
- Community Development

Skills for health advocacy

- Identified skills in CanMEDS roles and community organizations
- Co-operation with non-health professionals
- Communication with non-medical stakeholders

Physicians’ roles as health advocates

- CanMEDS Health Advocate role too narrow
- Both empowerment & protection / prevention approaches needed

Physicians need to learn about

- Patients’ lived experiences
- Community resources / assets / expertise
- Identity of marginalized populations (cultural differences, history, language, etc.)
- Effects of power and privilege (how to use power; what it is like to be powerless)
- Barriers to accessing health care

Role of community organizations in teaching health advocacy

- Provide opportunities to partner on advocacy projects
- Share information about what they do and community resources
- Identify knowledgeable people in their communities who could teach residents

Conclusions

- Many parallels between health advocacy work by community organizations and role of physicians
- Community organizations have expertise in doing health advocacy to share with physician trainees.
- Public consultation can enrich and clarify CanMEDS roles and provide new directions for postgraduate education.

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