



Saint Vincent
Catholic Medical Centers
Foundation

**THE MURRAY J. BERENSON, M.D., PROGRAM IN QUALITY CARE AND
PHYSICIAN-PATIENT COMMUNICATION**

Background and Rationale

As medicine has become increasingly technological, and cost-pressures under managed care have swamped doctors' practices and hospital priorities, the humanistic element of medical care—the doctor-patient relationship—has too often fallen by the wayside. Physicians who are preoccupied with meeting reimbursement guidelines and maximizing their patient census have less and less time to spend listening to their patients' concerns and complaints and communicating with compassion and dignity about diagnosis and treatment. At the same time, patients and their families are increasingly tech-savvy, researching their symptoms and medications on the Internet and coming to their appointments armed with information that may or may not be accurate, but may, in fact, overwhelm them.

This has led to a major crisis in medicine today—a vast and growing communication gap between doctors and patients that can affect the quality of care and, ultimately, a patient's successful recovery from injury, illness, or disease.

It is only very recently that the medical profession has recognized this growing crisis and begun to incorporate training in communication skills into medical school curricula. But the majority of physicians who are on hospital staff and have been practicing for a while have not had the benefit of such training. It is incumbent upon the leadership of St. Vincent's Hospital to provide our physicians and other medical staff with a high level of in-service education and training in listening, speaking, and human interaction skills that are so essential to their continued success as caregivers and their patients' well being.

For over 40 years, Dr. Murray Berenson, now retired, was one of St. Vincent's most accomplished and distinguished physicians. As an internist and gastroenterologist he was renowned as an excellent diagnostician, largely because he was able to communicate effectively with his patients. This essential skill must be learned by all physicians and it is the mission of the *Murray J. Berenson, M.D. Program in Quality Care and Physician-Patient Communication* to ensure that communication with patients and families is a vital part of the education of physicians and other members of the healthcare team at St. Vincent's Hospital.

Mission and Goals

The mission of the Berenson Quality Program is to enhance physician communication skills with the goal of improved patient outcomes through better diagnostics and increased patient participation in decisionmaking about their medical care, as well as their families' ability to understand treatment plans. Augmenting the skills of SVCMC's professional staff will facilitate the delivery of the highest quality care to our patients.

In addition to the direct benefit to patient medical care, sharpening physician communication skills will also benefit both the hospital and physicians themselves by increasing patient satisfaction and lowering the possibility of malpractice suits. In fact, research has shown a direct correlation between patient satisfaction with their doctor and the care he or she provides and reduced malpractice costs.

Berenson Quality Program Content

The Murray J. Berenson, M.D., Program in Quality Care and Physician-Patient Communication will consist initially of three parts:

- An annual lecture series will feature prominent and inspirational leaders in the field of medical communication, providing role models for our physicians.

Among the experts to be considered are Dr. Jerome Groopman of Harvard University, author of *How Doctors Think*, and Dr. Atul Gawande, 2006 MacArthur Fellow and author of *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science* and *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance*.

- A series of small group seminars for physicians and other hospital staff will be held to incorporate both didactic content and practical exercises, such as interactive education and active listening. The seminars will:
 - Teach best practices in physician-patient communication, with a focus on developing empathy and engaging the emotional and spiritual component of healing in interactions with patients.
 - Utilize role-play and active listening exercises to help physicians expand and hone a broader array of diagnostic techniques that reach beyond medical testing to incorporate the human element.
 - Provide feedback to physicians as they learn to more effectively engage patients and their families in developing treatment plans and adherence strategies.
 - Teach physicians and other members of the healthcare team techniques for addressing the growing phenomenon of medical information on the Internet that may or may not be helpful to patients in understanding or self-diagnosing their illness.
 - Develop a holistic framework to help physicians address the totality of their patients needs: physical, emotional, and spiritual.
- A series of focus groups drawn from patients/family members within the hospital as well as from the larger community will be conducted to provide insights into the issues patients and families face in communicating with members of the healthcare team. These concerns will then be incorporated into the seminar curriculum.

Leadership and Funding of the Berenson Quality Program

The Program will be piloted as a quality initiative within the hospital and managed by a senior, full-time attending physician who will receive an annual stipend. This physician will be supported by a designated second- or third-year Fellow, who will assist in developing details of the program working with medical leadership within the Department, and ultimately, across the institution.

The *Friends of Murray J. Berenson, M.D.*, has been formed and has provided seed funding for the program. A leadership group will be identified from within the *Friends* group to lead the fund-raising activities for the program among grateful patients. Annual reports on the progress of the program will be shared.

The objective of this effort will be to raise \$2 million in endowment from which an estimated \$100,000 per year will be earned to underwrite the program. Programming will be based on the availability of funding. The funds will be governed under the investment policies of the SVCMC Board of Directors. Once the program demonstrates a track record, proposals may be directed to foundations that fund medical education to assist with program enhancement.

Expansion of Berenson Quality Program

- As the program expands and its success is evaluated, it will be extended across the Medical Center system
- Help other hospitals replicate the program by developing an online curriculum featuring streaming videos and an instruction manual designed to teach the art of medical communication.

Assessment of Berenson Quality Program

- Develop specific measurable criteria to assess the program's effectiveness and determine how results may be replicated.
- Gauge the effectiveness of the program using the criteria of the STAR program that Saint Vincent Catholic Medical Centers has adopted to articulate and measure how divisions and programs throughout the system enhance the hospital's ability to deliver on its vision and mission.

Since its founding in 1849 by the Sisters of Charity, St. Vincent's Hospital has had a commitment to quality clinical, academic and research initiatives, always striving to provide excellent physical, emotional and spiritual care to its patients. The Mission of **The Murray J. Berenson, M.D., Program in Quality Care and Physician-Patient Communication** is aligned with this mission and the values of the hospital and exemplifies the principles that have guided Dr. Berenson's lifetime commitment to quality medical care for all.