

A Case Study of FREE



Families and Residents Educational Experience

Family Connection of South Carolina is a support network for families who have children with developmental delays, disabilities or chronic illnesses. As the statewide parent-to-parent organization Family Connection helps thousands of children reach their potential by providing parent-to-parent connections, linking families to community resources, and sponsoring educational and support programs. Family Connection is a leader in the State Medical Home Team.

In 1999, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education endorsed general competencies for pediatric residents in six areas. These competencies became a required part of residency programs in July 2003. Through funding from the Duke Endowment, Family Connection staff designed a program to teach pediatric residents to demonstrate awareness and knowledge in these six areas of competencies.

1. Patient Care
2. Medical Knowledge
3. Practice-Based Learning and Improvement
4. Interpersonal and Communication Skills
5. Professionalism
6. Systems-Based Practice

This program is called Families and Residents Educational Experience or FREE. The FREE program at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine is a collaborative effort between the Department of Pediatrics and Family Connection. The program teaches pediatric residents the knowledge and skills necessary to provide family-centered, community based care for children with special needs and their families. This program is unique in that families are the teachers and the community becomes the classroom. Each resident is matched with a teaching family. Families share their experiences and observations with this resident over his or her three years of training in pediatrics. The State Medical Home Team provides extensive medical home materials to the present training efforts. The Team includes representatives of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Family Connection, the state's Medicaid agency and the University of South Carolina School of Medicine.

Through a series of at least three home visits over three years, residents learn skills from the family with

whom they have been paired. Residents meet with project staff to reinforce learning objectives before the first home visit. The discussion during these sessions provides the opportunity for residents to question and reflect upon what they will be learning from families and to develop strategies for applying this knowledge to their clinical experiences.

The postgraduate year – 1 (PGY –1) consists of two discussion sessions and one home visit. There is a required community visit during the postgraduate year – 2 (PGY –2) year along with a discussion session. This broadens residents' understanding of non-clinical issues so they can envision how they, as practicing pediatricians, can advocate for children. The final visit occurs during the third year of residency. This is considered a fun visit and serves as closure for the families and residents.

Participating families are recruited, trained, and followed by project staff. Continuous improvement is assured through annual program evaluations completed by families and residents. Program implementation began in September 2003, within the Palmetto Health Richland Department of Pediatrics. Nine pediatric interns are currently paired with families. In July of 2004, eleven more interns will join the program. Greenville Hospital System's Department of Pediatrics residency program began this program in January 2004. There are twelve interns paired with families of special needs children.

Plans are underway to modify the FREE program for the Family Practice Residents at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine. These changes will include more orientations for the first year residents and a home visit each year. In addition, sixteen residents at the Medical University of South Carolina are beginning the program in 2004.

For more information contact: Kathy Taylor at Family Connection of South Carolina – 1-800-578-8750 or kathytaylor@familyconnectionsc.org. Or contact Betsy Wolff, Project Coordinator for the State Medical Home Team – 1-803-782-0238 or betsywolff@aol.com.