

A Brief Empathy Intervention Using the EASE Framework: A Pilot Study in Graduate Medical Education

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Abstract
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Abstract

INTRODUCTION

Empathy is a core competency of patient-centered care in graduate medical education (GME), yet structured empathy training is inconsistently incorporated into residency education. Empathy frequently declines during residency due to time pressure, emotional fatigue, and competing clinical demands.

OBJECTIVE

To evaluate the educational impact and implementation feasibility of a brief, structured empathy intervention using the EASE framework (Empathy and Emergent Care, Ailment, Social Determinants, Education, Emotional Well-being) for incoming residents, a novel conceptual framework developed by the Primary Investigator.

METHODS

We conducted a mixed-methods pre-post study during June 2025 at Sinai, Chicago- safety-net academic institution. Incoming residents from multiple specialties participated in a 1-hour interactive workshop introducing the EASE framework. Pre- and post-intervention surveys assessed empathy-related knowledge and self-reported confidence using six locally-developed Likert-scale items. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired t-tests. Qualitative free-text responses were analyzed thematically.

RESULTS

37 residents completed both pre-and post-intervention surveys. Residents demonstrated statistically significant improvements in all measured domains, including understanding the EASE framework (mean change 2.95, $p < 0.00001$), knowledge of patient-centered care (mean change 0.89, $p < 0.00001$), and self-reported confidence in addressing patients' social and emotional needs (mean change 0.51, $p = 0.0004$). Qualitative themes included valuing structured approaches to empathy, increased awareness of social determinants of health, recognition of systemic barriers, and intent to apply EASE in clinical practice.

CONCLUSIONS

A brief, structured EASE-based workshop improved self-reported empathy-related knowledge and confidence among incoming residents. This pilot study demonstrates feasibility and acceptability; future studies using validated instruments, and behavioral outcomes are needed.