



SECTION SIXTEEN

THE MINI-INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

A mini-internship program is a grass-roots effort to improve understanding among emergency physicians, the media, elected officials, and other leaders in the community. The program involves inviting laypersons to visit an emergency department and spend clinical time with the emergency physician. As with traditional medical training, the “intern” is allowed to directly observe and learn from interactions among ED personnel, the emergency medical services system, patients, family members, and other health care providers. The goal is to foster a better understanding of the realities and challenges of the practice of emergency medicine, and to build relationships that could prove helpful for emergency medicine in the future.

Background

With the prevailing perception that medical costs are out of control and that health care delivery must be “reformed,” legislative efforts tend to focus exclusively on cost containment, especially when dealing with access to EDs. Unfortunately, problems of access to other primary care providers and the unique difficulties of dealing with patients experiencing an emergency medical condition are not often appreciated by the lay public, and

the importance of personal interaction between physicians and patients tends to be overlooked. The mini-internship is designed to focus more on the “art” of the practice of medicine by allowing the intern to experience the doctor/patient relationship from the emergency physician’s point of view. This has proved to be a very effective method of building support for emergency medicine’s goals among political leaders and other influential members of the community.

Advantages

This type of program offers advantages to both the physicians and the interns who are involved. It promotes better understanding between physicians and community leaders by revealing the realistic, human aspects of health care delivery problems. It can be a cost-effective community relation’s tool and has the added advantage of increasing the involvement of ACEP members in the chapter’s political activities. Perhaps the best result from the physician’s standpoint is the establishment of positive relationships with legislators and community leaders. Over time, these relationships can be of great value in achieving the chapter’s long-term goals. The interns also benefit by receiving a perspective on the

delivery of emergency medical care that is not often available to the layperson. It also affords an opportunity for policymakers and political leaders to develop contacts and resources within the medical profession, which they can rely on for advice when making decisions that will affect the future delivery of health care in their communities. Done properly, it can be a “win-win” situation for all involved.

Organization

Your ACEP chapter, through its board of directors or legislative committee, should coordinate the mini-internship program. Give careful thought to which legislators and community leaders should be invited to participate. Those who should be considered for invitation include state and federal elected officials and their aides, members of key legislative committees, industry and business leaders from the community, members of the media, clergy, and leaders of service groups. It is usually best to have one or, at most, two interns observing in an ED at any given time.

When the list of potential interns is determined, letters of invitation should be sent to these individuals (see example at end of this chapter). Try to offer at least three dates when EDs will be available to host the interns. An excellent time for elected officials to visit is during legislative recess periods, when they have fewer commitments at the capitol and tend to be in the area to meet with constituents. Once the intern has accepted, send an acknowledgement letter with specifics regarding date, time, location, etc. Include a confidentiality agreement for their signature (see example at end of this chapter).

Choose an ED (or EDs) that will demonstrate a patient population best illustrating the chapter’s key issues. The physicians involved also should be chosen carefully, and should be knowledgeable and conversant with the issues important to both the local and national emergency medical communities. They should be ready to discuss these issues without preaching and in a nonargumentative way, and should use patient interactions to demonstrate important points to the intern. Permission for the

visit should be obtained in advance from the administrators of the hospitals involved. Be prepared to discuss with the administrators the advantages that this type of program provides for the hospital as well as for physicians and the community.

The Intern Visit

Have the intern report directly to the ED at the agreed-upon time. Intern visits can be arranged at any time of the day or night, depending on the intern’s schedule, but busy ED times are preferable. Provide a white lab coat for the intern to wear. A nametag or badge identifying the intern by name or as a “visitor” can be used, depending on hospital policy. If the intern is an elected official, it may be appropriate to have a photographer present to document the visit for the media. If this is considered, discuss the idea with and secure an approval from the intern’s and hospital’s media relations aide (press secretary) prior to the visit.

Some programs have the intern follow a physician who is actually on duty and responsible for patient care, but if the shift is busy, there may be little time for discussion between the intern and the physician. An alternative is to have the intern hosted by a physician who is not actually scheduled to work. This physician then can see selected patients with the intern and take as much time as needed to discuss patient care and other important issues between and during patient encounters. Meanwhile, other staff physicians can handle the majority of patient care.

The physician should introduce the intern to each patient who is to be evaluated. Ask the patient’s permission for the intern to observe the evaluation and treatment. The intern will need to leave the examining room if the patient so chooses. Obviously, interns should not be present during any part of the physical examination that may be embarrassing to the patient (such as genital examinations), during questioning or counseling of a sensitive or private nature, or if the intern is acquainted with the patient. Use common sense and respect patient confidentiality and feelings. Be particularly careful when dealing with situations

concerning death and dying. This is something that emergency personnel deal with frequently, but these situations can be extremely difficult emotionally for laypersons. Be especially cognizant of and sensitive to the intern's level of comfort in these matters.

Interns should not be allowed to inspect patient records, but ED documentation and related paperwork (such as transfer forms) can be demonstrated. The intern thus will have the opportunity to learn about the paperwork burdens of an emergency practice. Allow interns to listen to your interactions with the ED staff, other physicians, and family members, and explain the significance of these conversations with the intern.

Interns can observe procedures, but they are not medical assistants and should not be expected to function as such. They are in your department to observe and learn, not to be put to work.

Take every opportunity to discuss the issues important to your chapter and encourage any questions that the intern may have on various aspects and problems of emergency medical care. Always remember that the intern is not likely to be fluent in medical terminology or abbreviations, so speak in layperson terms and avoid jargon. The program's goals are more likely to be accomplished by open, frank, and honest discussions of real problems and issues.

After the Visit

Consider hosting a dinner (as a debriefing session) at the end of the program, especially if several interns have visited different EDs. Allow each intern and physician to express impressions of the visit and provide time for an open forum to discuss questions, observations, concerns, etc. The cost of this function should be covered by the chapter or sponsoring organization.

A thank-you note and an evaluation form should be sent to the interns and physicians who participated in the program. The evaluation form should ask for the impressions of the participants and should solicit suggestions as to how the program can be improved. Consider sending a "certificate of completion" of the mini-internship program to the individuals involved (see example at the end of this chapter).

For an example of an effective chapter mini-internship program, the NJ chapter provided [these resources](#), which include recommended action steps in setting up a mini-internship, as well as sample letters, forms and talking points. For more information on this program, contact the State Legislative Office.

Initial letter to intern candidates

Date

Name

Title

Firm Name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Dear Name:

We are all busy people, and we know your time is valuable. But we would like to extend to you an invitation to share a unique experience that will take two to four hours of your time.

We invite you to participate in (*chapter name*)'s Mini-Internship Program. Through shared experiences, this project is designed to open lines of communication and expand perspectives on important health care issues.

Our mini-internship offers an opportunity for people who affect, carry out or report on health care policy to observe the practice of emergency medicine and to experience firsthand the drama and rewards of this essential part of our health care delivery system.

(NOTE TO PROGRAM ORGANIZERS: The following paragraph isn't appropriate for your first mini-internship, but can be used for subsequent internships.)

Names of interns from previous programs are enclosed for your information.

As an intern, you will be assigned to an emergency physician who is one of your constituents, and will accompany him/her on an actual shift in an emergency department. We recommend you allow from two to four hours for the internship and suggest scheduling it for a Friday or Saturday night.

You may call the chapter's (*title*) (*name*), if you have any questions about the program. He/she will be happy to discuss program details with you.

Mini-internship is a two-way communication project designed as an information exchange to broaden the perspectives of all participants – including our member physicians.

Please join us for this unique program.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Enclosures: Response Form
Return Envelope

Intern Response Form

- Yes, I will be happy to participate as a (*name of chapter*) Intern.
- No, I cannot join the Mini-Internship Program at this time, but I would like to be invited to participate in a future program.
- No, thank you. I have no time to commit to this program.

Comments: _____

Your Name (please print): _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Home Phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Please instruct my assigned physician(s) that I will need a size _____ lab coat.

(*Name of Chapter*)

Mini-Internship Program

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, (intern name) _____, will be participating in the (*Chapter Name*) Mini-Internship Program. Recognizing the importance of preserving the integrity of the physician/patient relationship, I promise to honor the confidentiality of each patient whose care and treatment I am allowed to observe with the doctor as part of my participation in the program.

I agree that I will not reveal to anyone the names of the individual patients whose care and treatment I observe as a result of my participation in the program, nor will I discuss with anyone any details of the mini-internship experience that might cause any patient's identity to be revealed.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Please return your completed agreement to the ACEP chapter in the enclosed reply envelope. Thank you.

Initial letter to prospective physician faculty

Date

Physician's Name

Facility Name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Dear Dr. Name:

(Name of your chapter) invites you to serve as a physician “faculty member” for our Mini-Internship Program *(dates)*. The committee has selected you on the basis of your personal qualities we consider important to the program’s success.

The people we will invite to be interns include your elected or appointed officials and media. Interns will spend two to four hours with you on a shift in your emergency department and will be encouraged to ask questions and discuss their concerns openly during these visits.

You are expected: (1) to make any necessary arrangements with your hospital administration and (2) to provide your intern with a lab coat for his/her use during their visit.

We know this invitation asks considerable commitment of your time and expertise, but ACEP chapters across the country have found the program worthwhile and the response from participating physicians and interns overwhelmingly positive.

Our primary goals are: (1) to spotlight the physician/patient relationship, and (2) to open lines of communication between the emergency medical community, federal and state officials, and the media.

(NOTE TO PROGRAM ORGANIZERS: After you have conducted several mini-internships, you can use evaluation comments from Interns as testimonials for the program.

Please read the enclosed Program Guidelines before you decide whether or not to participate.

We sincerely hope you will be able to take part in this important project. Please feel free to call *(name, title)* at the chapter office if you have any questions. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Enclosures: Program Guidelines
Physician Response Sheet
Reply Envelope

Program Guidelines

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The Intern Visit

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Interns should not be allowed to inspect patient records, but ED documentation and related paperwork (such as transfer forms) can be demonstrated. The intern thus will have the opportunity to learn about the paperwork burdens of an emergency practice. Allow interns to listen to your interactions with the ED staff, other physicians, and family members, and explain the significance of these conversations with the intern.

One chapter once used its mini-internship program to allow the intern to call the insurance company for authorization to evaluate and treat the patient, providing the intern with valuable insight on the difficulties and delays in receiving such authorization.

Interns can observe simple procedures, but they are not medical assistants and should not be expected to function as such. They are in your department to observe and learn, not to be put to work.

Take every opportunity to discuss the issues important to your chapter and encourage any questions that the intern may have on various aspects and problems of emergency medical care. Always remember that the intern is not likely to be fluent in medical terminology or abbreviations, so speak in layperson terms and avoid jargon. The program's goals are more likely to be accomplished by open, frank, and honest discussions of real problems and issues.

Physicians Response Sheet

Please print your name: _____

- Yes, I will serve as a faculty member in the Mini-Internship Program.
- No, I cannot participate this time, but please invite me to the next program.
- No, I will not participate in the program at any time.

I will make arrangements (including notifying all appropriate persons at hospitals or other facilities I will be using) for interns to accompany me. I will comply with all hospital protocols and see that staff in my department (or other facility) is apprised of these visits and know when to expect visitors.

NOTE: Please provide an explicit meeting time and place. It is not enough to specify "Hendricks Memorial Hospital." Please state exactly where and when you will meet, such as: Hendricks Memorial Hospital Physicians' Lounge or Emergency Department Lobby or Admissions Information Desk, etc.

Following are dates and times I am available to participate in the internship:

Date: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Time: _____

Meeting place, address, directions

Meeting place, address, directions

Date: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Time: _____

Meeting place, address, directions

Meeting place, address, directions

Acknowledgement letter to accepting interns

Date

Name

Title

Firm Name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Dear Dr. Name:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Mini-Internship Program of the _____ chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians. We look forward to sharing with you this unique opportunity to observe firsthand this essential part of our health care delivery system.

Our Mini-Internship Program has two guidelines. First and foremost is your agreement to have absolute respect for the patient's right to confidentiality. As an intern, you must divulge no information about individual patients – who also have the option of refusing your presence in the examining room. This option is seldom exercised in a Mini-Internship Program. On those few occasions, the interns have admitted they would have felt uncomfortable observing those patients.

Enclosed is a brief confidentiality agreement. Please read it over, then sign and return it in the enclosed reply envelope.

Second, we seek your active participation throughout the internship. We hope you will express your views about health care and come prepared to ask questions during your visit.

We appreciate your cooperation and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Enclosures: Confidentially Agreement
Reply Envelope

Mini-Internship Program – INTERN EVALUATION

1. In your opinion, was your participation in the program “time well spent”?
 Yes No _____

2. Did you experience any difficulty with the medical facility’s staff with respect to in-hospital procedures during your participation?
 Yes No _____

3. Patient attitude: Were the majority of the patients receptive to your presence?
 Yes No _____

4. What further role could the chapter have played in facilitating the mini-internship program?

5. Do you feel that you developed a working relationship with your emergency physician mentor?
 Yes No _____

6. Would you feel comfortable discussing medical issues with this physician in the future?
 Yes No _____

7. What do you feel the physician gained from the time he/she spent with you?

8. Do you feel that _____ hours were the appropriate amount for time for the internship?
 Yes No _____

9. What other community members would benefit from participating in a mini-internship program? List specific people if possible. _____

10. Any general comments or observations are welcome.

Name (optional): _____

Physician(s): _____

Please return this form in the enclosed envelope to: (*Chapter name, address, city, state, ZIP*)

Thank you letter to interns

Date

Name

Title

Organization Name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Dear Dr. Name:

Thank you for sharing your time with us as a participant in the (name of chapter)'s Mini-Internship Program. We welcomed your input and were pleased to include you in this project.

The mini-internship's success undoubtedly stems from interns' wholehearted participation; we are grateful for your interest and insights.

Thank you again for participating in our Mini-Internship Program. If we can ever be of service to you, please give us a call.

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Enclosures: Photo (optional)
Certificate (optional)

Thank you letter to physicians

Date

Physician's Name

Facility Name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Dear Dr. Name:

Thank you for joining in the Mini-Internship Program. This project is designed to open lines of communication and expand perspectives on health care issues – for community representative and physicians alike.

We are planning another Mini-Internship Program (*dates*). If you are interested in serving on the faculty, please let us know. Also, we'd appreciate your recommending any colleagues you think are good faculty candidates.

The Mini-Internship Program couldn't exist without the cooperation of physicians like you. Thank you again for making this program possible.

Sincerely,

Name

Title