Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess whether the integration of a blended learning environment that includes the use of a social media tool will improve the educational experience of both medical students and residents during an Internal Medicine Ward rotation. Specifically, we examined whether incorporating “Box” as a platform for communicating with learners improved: feedback, communication of goals, and promotion of self-directed learning.

Background

There is an increase in the use of web-based collaborative software in undergraduate & graduate education. The notion of “anytime, anyplace” communication is characteristic of the millennial population which has facilitated the growth of a hybrid learning environment. There are limited reports of use of this communication platform in medical education.

Study Hypothesis:

The integration of a collaborative software application in a high demand, inpatient clinical rotation will positively influence medical education and important components of the learning process.

Methods

We compared the usefulness and functionality of several software options: (1) Department hard-drive (2) Share-Point (3) Desire2Learn (4) Cerner social media application and (5) Box. Of these choices, “Box” was chosen based on several factors: - Ease of use (collaborative & interactive potential) - Portability (smart phone / tablet operational) - Alerts and HIPPA compliance

“Box” was implemented into two Internal Medicine rotations and learners were assessed on their acceptance of “Box” and its perceived impact in the following areas: - Learning environment - Communication of goals - Feedback - Promotion of self-directed learning

Preliminary Survey Data

Results

Learners responded with the following trends regarding practical use of “Box” and its impact on learning:

Most learners (>90%) thought that a social media tool offered more opportunities for communication and would like to use a social media tool on future clinical rotations (>70%).

The following areas were positively assessed (>60%):

- Improved learning environment and features of feedback
- Promotion of self-directed learning
- Clarity of expectations and goals
- Enhanced opportunities for patient discussion and attending response to learners’ questions
- Development of ownership over personal learning

Box did not motivate learners to ask more questions (58%).

Conclusions

Replicating blended learning environments from other fields requires leveraging technology to fit departments’ teaching and learning needs. In this study, we implemented “Box” and found the interactive file sharing application was beneficial to learners in the clinical teaching environment in the promotion of learning, communication of goals, feedback, and promoting self-directed learning.

Although learners indicated the tool was beneficial overall, they still preferred verbal to written feedback. This finding points to the important role of social interaction in the clinical environment. At the same time, learners felt they received more opportunities to respond to attendings’ feedback with the implementation of “Box.”

Future research should examine innovative use of collaborative software in the clinical setting to evaluate its impact on educational outcomes.