Scientists and Engineers Expanding Diversity and Success (SEEDS)

“You Choose” Award

Final Report

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**Goals Accomplished**

The “Demystifying the Legal System: Medical Malpractice Workshop” was successfully completed on April 15th, from 5:30-7:00pm, at the Berrocal Auditorium at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute at the University of Miami Medical Campus.

The goal of the grant was to “demystify” the legal system for trainees, namely residents and fellows. During the course of the lecture, the attendees learned the definition of a subpoena, how to determine the HIPAA compliance of a records request; whether a physician is obligated to give a phone consult to an attorney; the difference between fact testimony, expert witness and malpractice cases; how to determine disability; the mechanics of a deposition; and the rights of the physician to seek financial compensation for his/her time. Examples of legal cases were given and the audience had an opportunity to test their knowledge by determining whether or not medical malpractice was committed. Additionally, examples of depositions were given and the audience received tips on both proper and improper conduct during a deposition.

During the course of the lecture, attendees were given opportunities to ask questions and were advised by the attorneys. The session facilitated interaction between physicians and attorneys, thus shaping an environment of collegiality between attorneys and physicians.

**Career Impact**

I am extremely grateful to have been selected as a recipient of the Scientists and Engineers Expanding Diversity and Success (SEEDS) “You Choose” Award. Understanding the complexities of the legal system is of utmost importance to any physician, as statistics show that one in fourteen physicians receives a malpractice claim each year. This fact indicates that it is highly likely that I will face legal action, and may face more than one claim during the course of my career. As this can happen at any point, comprehending the complexities of the legal system and familiarizing myself with the proper handling of the claim early is crucial.

Malpractice claims are not the only time physicians are involved in the legal system. Knowing the mechanics of the legal system, the progression of a case, and good techniques for depositions and testimony are critical as we are also called upon as treating physicians or expert witnesses to testify regarding the patient’s status at the time they were evaluated. Knowing what a subpoena is, the obligations when I receive one and what to do during the subsequent deposition is extremely useful in alleviating my fears as well as serving to protect myself against the potential of legal action. Delving into the material with experts present and asking questions directly to the experts furthered my own knowledge. It also created an open forum in which challenging situations were discussed and fostered a convivial relationship between the legal and medical communities.