



Advance Intervention Design Course Teaches Students About New York State Prison Healthcare and Reentry Programs

Students in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences interviewed Lester Wright, MD, MPH, Deputy Commissioner and Chief Medical Officer, New York State Department of Correctional Services, and lecturer, Columbia University School of Nursing, at a luncheon presentation and discussion on March 28. The interview—a simulation of a key informant interview—was led, and conducted in large part by students taking the Advanced Intervention Design Course.

“As part of the course, students are responsible for designing a multi-level intervention to address the actual problem of increased incidence of HIV and Hepatitis C in inmates being released from the jails in the South Bronx,” explained the instructor of the course, Marita Murrman, EdD, associate clinical professor of Sociomedical Sciences.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Murrman introduced Dr. Wright, who has been in his current role at the New York State Department of Correctional Services for the past 12 years. He has extensive experience establishing networks of primary care programs and mid-level practitioner training programs.

Dr. Wright began with a brief presentation about New York’s prison system and the healthcare programs he directs. He explained that prisoners are one of the few populations in the United States that have a constitutional right to healthcare. While states interpret the mandate in different ways, Dr. Wright said that with the support of New York State, he constantly strives to improve the health of inmates and provide the best healthcare possible.

Students Dave Reynolds, Evelyn Choudhury, Deepali Meheshwari, and Sarah Gorell began their interview with questions relating to HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and mental health, as well as prison policy, infrastructure technology, and management.

Several questions focused on issues relating to medical record transportation within the correctional system and upon release of an inmate, particularly in light of the fact that there is no electronic system for transferring records.

Responding to the questions, Dr. Wright explained that a summary travels with the individual, but comprehensive records are only supplied to healthcare professions within the correctional system. Doctors outside the system are rarely identified for inmates before they leave the system.

Dr. Wright puts a high priority on the need for an integrated database that would enable healthcare professionals to share records electronically. “It is one of the top two items on my wish list,” said Dr. Wright.

“Dr. Wright provided vital information for our intervention mapping project by sharing knowledge of key environmental determinants affecting the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations in New York State,” said Ms. Choudhury.

Miguel Munoz-Laboy, assistant professor of Sociomedical Sciences (SMS) and panel moderator, invited additional SMS students to participate in the event. Dr. Munoz-Laboy is also an advisor for the students and works in the field of sexually transmitted infections and prison populations.

This course came about as a result of students asking for more advanced training in this area. Dr. Murrman took up the challenge to develop this new course and began teaching it in the spring of 2007. Now, in response to tremendous student interest, the course will be divided into two sections for the upcoming academic year. Dr. Murrman's section will focus on health promotion and Dr. Munoz-Laboy's will focus on issues related to sexual health.