Training physicians in South Texas to deliver SBIRT practices: A pre-curricular assessment

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**BACKGROUND.** Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) is an evidence-based approach to early interventions for persons at risk for substance use disorders. Because few physicians routinely incorporate SBIRT into clinical practice, we initiated a training program, SBIRT South Texas Area Residency Training (S-START), funded by SAMHSA. Our objective was to improve knowledge, attitudes, and SBIRT practices in 539 resident physicians in five medical specialties over the next four years, with sustained curricular and clinical practices thereafter. This paper reports pre-implementation findings about resident knowledge and attitudes regarding substance abuse.

**METHODS.** Project S-START was launched in 2009 with 91 Family Medicine and Pediatrics residents at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. Medicine, Psychiatry, and Ob-Gyn residents will follow in 2010. Eight training modules incorporate diverse teaching strategies to promote higher-order active learning. All specialties will share a core curriculum, and develop specialty-specific strategies for varying populations, clinical settings, and substances of abuse.

**RESULTS:** Of 91 initial trainees, 30% were male, 33% were Hispanic, and 34% were white. Most (90%) reported attending previous lectures about substance abuse. Pre-implementation SBIRT knowledge was low, with 32-54% correct responses. On the *Alcohol Education Survey*, residents reported high responsibility (93/100) to practice SBIRT, but rated their actual SBIRT practices (63/100) and their confidence about SBIRT (64/100) much lower. Overall, their attitudes were positive (79/100), and their readiness to do SBIRT was high (86/100).

**CONCLUSIONS:** At baseline, residents’ knowledge was suboptimal, but they felt responsible, optimistic and ready to practice SBIRT.