

METABOLIC OUTREACH SERVICE

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Genetic metabolic disorders are complex medical conditions that demand expert care. However, the quality of training about metabolic disease at the medical school and post-graduate levels is generally poor. Furthermore, the number of clinicians available to diagnose and treat these disorders is woefully inadequate. Because the number of trainees in this subspecialty area is low and the population of diagnosed patients expected to rise (with all the work involved in their care), the crisis in clinical biochemical genetics will only worsen over time.

The Metabolic Outreach Service (MOS) provides an educational and consultative outreach to academic medical centers in the northeast that currently do not have an on-site metabolic program. By increasing awareness about metabolic disease among clinicians and medical trainees through an ongoing educational program, and by developing consultative relationships between established metabolic clinics and these academic centers, the MOS hopes to change clinical practice allowing earlier metabolic diagnoses (with more rapid implementation of therapy) to occur. This "virtual metabolic program" will occur over five years and is expected to increase referrals to all regional metabolic centers. A number of provider- and patient-oriented outcome parameters will be used to monitor the success of the MOS.

The MOS integrates multiple educational strategies effective in changing physician practice, including active participation in workshops, case reviews, face-to-face teaching and teaching in small groups, and reinforcement with printed materials. The regularity of outreach interactions and availability of consultants for case reviews allow the repeated exposure of non-academic clinicians to metabolic concepts and concerns which should promote learning. It is also hoped that the regular contact of students, interns and residents with metabolic patients and metabolic disease will encourage applications to clinical biochemical genetics training programs.

The MOS is not intended to replace the need for genetic metabolic training, nor does it negate the importance of existing metabolic centers. Finally it is not a plan to develop some enormous referral network for Tufts-New England Medical Center. Rather, it is a grass-roots approach to increase knowledge about inborn errors of metabolism and allow non-genetic clinicians to participate more in the diagnosis and management of metabolic disease.
