



Three Questions for Jose Franco, MD

Perspectives on the Transformation of Medical Education

Transformational Times: Tell us about your journey with the Kern Institute.

Dr. Franco: Dr. Cheryl Maurana, the institute's inaugural director, asked me to be the associate director of the Kern Institute at its inception after MCW received the Kern Family Foundation grant in 2017. During the first year, we were busy with planning and defining the role of the institute. When the four "pillars" were created (Students, Faculty, Curriculum, Culture), we developed the "cross-pillar" team that would focus on areas that were important but which none of the pillars owned; areas like wellness, character, and caring. Under Ryan Spellecy's leadership, for example, we ran focus groups and developed scholarship around "character" in medical education.

When Dr. Adina Kalet became the institute director in 2019, she saw a need to connect more intentionally within the institution and with our urban community, so the cross-pillar activities evolved into community and institutional engagement roles in ways that focused on education. I took on a more active role with event planning, recruiting speakers and panelists, and hosting Grand Rounds, Kern Connection Cafes, and Journal Clubs. It has all been a virtual-reality challenge over the past year.

While this has been going on, I have retained my clinical identity in hepatology and continued to engage with students at all levels. I still look forward to my days in clinic working with our entire group of physicians, students, trainees, PAs, and NPs. They are a great team! I enjoy teaching

M1 gastrointestinal physiology, hepatology in the M2 GI nutrition unit and clinical hepatology to the M3 students rotating on internal medicine. I often work with M4 students on electives. I spend time on the wards and in clinic with internal medicine and general surgery residents and fellows. I am fortunate to work with medical students and trainees along every point of the training spectrum. I enjoy that.

Transformational Times: What do you see as your most urgent tasks as you move into your new role as Senior Associate Dean?

Dr. Franco: First of all, we have to define who constitutes our customers in Academic Affairs. Our customers are the students and the faculty.

For students:

Academic Affairs focuses on curriculum. We must ask ourselves: *Is our curriculum really preparing the students for the next phase of their careers?* We do a great job covering the basic and clinical sciences but could do a better job with the social sciences. For example, students must leave MCW with a robust understanding and engagement with issues surrounding social determinants of health, and the wellbeing of marginalized populations. Those educational and experiential areas need attention.

As an educational institution, we must do a better job fostering an inclusive, diverse environment. We are fortunate to have students who identify as being from underrepresented in medicine groups. We must ensure that they feel welcome, included, and empowered. There are, of course, great people at MCW doing this already and I hope Academic Affairs will enhance these efforts. Diversity makes us all better.

Focusing our efforts on student wellness and wellbeing will be critical. The gaps here constitute a national crisis. When students

and young physicians are in crisis, they will “fall out of love” with medicine. Too often, physicians end up seeing medicine as a “job” and not a “calling.” We must explore how we can prepare students and residents to be fully engaged and resilient for their entire careers. I would love to play a part helping students optimize their physical, mental, and spiritual health as human beings.

For faculty:

I sense that faculty often see the Office of Academic Affairs as a “black hole.” I believe that the Kern Institute has worked to inform the faculty what it does through regular engagement and communication. In much the same way, Academic Affairs needs to let the faculty know what it does.

The office has many resources that can help the faculty perform their roles as teachers and mentors. We have expertise in instructional design and educational technology, for example. We need to let the faculty know what is available, who to talk to, and how they can be the best educators possible.

***Transformational Times:* How do you see the current status of the curriculum redesign?**

Dr. Franco: The answer to that changes from week-to-week. MCW’s faculty are well aware that there is no perfect curriculum and that there is always room to make improvements. That said, we have been through change before and, even though we know there is a need to make adjustments, these processes always cause anxiety. The process will always feel like a curveball.

First of all, I am certain that we will be given the resources to do the curriculum redesign correctly. Senior leadership is onboard, responsive, and wants this to succeed.

What is our goal? Let's start by saying that our goal is to work together to deliver a quality product. We could, of course, put out something tomorrow, but would it be quality?

I sense that there are two major faculty concerns as the process moves forward:

The first major area of concern revolves around faculty development and preparation for the redesign.

MCW's preclinical curriculum has often relied heavily on the traditional fifty-minute lecture format with few interactive opportunities. If we plan to institute a flipped-classroom, case-based teaching approach, we must have a fully engaged and prepared faculty. We must better understand how long it will take to bring everyone up to speed.

We need to engage the clinicians who will be expected to take on new teaching responsibilities. Clinicians will be increasingly integrated into the process and the proposals will require different approaches that will expand their teaching approaches and challenge their skill sets.

The second major area of concern is the timeline.

Is the timeline for deploying the newly redesigned curriculum in August 2022 realistic and optimal? Although it is over a year away, we have a much shorter time to make a decision, since we will begin interviewing the entering class of students late this summer. They are the "customers," as it were, of the new curriculum. They are the ones who will have to decide if they want to come and

experience what we will be offering. We need to be clear with them as to what the curriculum will look like.

I know that many of the faculty have expressed strong opinions. We must work together and make certain we are all ready and onboard.

The curriculum belongs to the faculty and the Curriculum and Evaluation Committee (CEC) has the critical role here. I had the good fortune to be chair of the CEC when the pilot integrated curriculum was approved. A few years later, I brought proposals for curricular change to the CEC. I have been on both sides of the table. As a result, I hope I will be in a good position to listen to peoples' concerns. What excites them? What worries them?

I am excited to take on this role at this important time for our students and our faculty.

Jose Franco, MD, is the Interim Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. He is a Professor in the Department of Medicine (Gastroenterology and Hepatology) at MCW. He previously held leadership roles in the Robert D. and Patricia E. Kern Institute for the Transformation of Medical Education.