Background

- Most medical student clerkships involve work overnight—whether night float system or traditional call.
- There are not much data evaluating student experience, nor how to improve their education.

Methods

- Qualitative study with grounded theory approach
- Individual interviews of 19 third-year medical students from May 2019-Dec 2020
- Students took part of 4-7 days of night float system at an academic children’s hospital, as part of pediatrics clerkship experience.
- Data analyzed using constant comparative method, and codes organized into themes.

Objective

Better evaluate the benefits and consequences of the medical student night float experience.

Results

Career Preparation
- Exposed students to possible future schedules.
- Particularly helpful for those considering hospital-based specialty.
- Increased students’ confidence in decision making.
- “Nights gives…a bit more insight into this career and training, and the logistics of working of night. It’s informative for the reality of the experience.”

Clinical Experience
- Primarily focused on admissions
- Allowed students to focus on differential diagnoses
- Evaluating “watchers”
- Better connection to families, nurses.
- “through nights I built, I’ve built better connections with families than I’ve been able to during the day.”

Lifestyle
- Biggest challenge was adjusting to new sleep schedule
- If dismissed early, were able to have more free time.
- Can be particularly hard on students with kids or pets.
- “The switching from days to night felt really tough…But as a student, it felt like I lost a whole weekend of being able to study… trying to adjust back.”

Education
- Less formal than daytime schedule
- More immediate and useful feedback
- Downtime learning either self-directed or informal lectures from residents.
- “Every day on nights, I had at least one time where I would do, and present an admission, and I could talk directly with the resident, and get feedback right then… giving formative feedback, and that was something that I haven't been able to do as much on days.”

Finding a Role and Team Dynamics
- Wide range of student experiences, with clear roles being crucial to student experience.
- Longer continuity with team was helpful for students to earn trust and gain confidence.
- Small teams either developed camaraderie or created potential for conflict.
- “on nights I was more confidently able to step up into that [primary provider] role because I thought…my resident and my intern were more appreciative of me.”

Conclusions

- Night float system can compliment daytime learning
- A well-defined role optimizes student satisfaction and education
- Self-directed learners tend to find the most benefit at night.

Implications

- Clerkships should consider including a nighttime clinical experience to allow for a different learning environment than daytime.
- Creating expectations of the student role could optimize student satisfaction and education.
- The career preparation could be especially important for sub-internships.