E-Poster

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Assessing the Effectiveness of Current Disability Education in US Medical Schools

Topic: Education (Medical Student, Residency & Post-Graduate)

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BACKGROUND

As of 2023, 27% of US adults identify as having a disability. Despite greater healthcare needs, persons with disabilities (PWDs) often face inadequate care due to knowledge gaps, insufficient education, societal barriers, and attitudes. Only 35.8% of physicians understand ADA responsibilities, 71.2% are unaware of who determines accommodations, and 40.7% feel confident providing equal care. While biases are evident, few studies address medical education as a root cause. Though 98% of medical students receive disability education, 80% find it insufficient. Limited research explores whether this education is actively improving medical student knowledge of disability healthcare needs.

METHODS

This survey assessed medical students' preparedness to treat patients with disabilities and explored their perceptions of disability curricula in their schools. It was distributed electronically to M.D., D.O., or combined degree students in US medical schools and was both voluntary and anonymous. Developed using existing literature and expert input for accessibility, it had five sections: demographics, knowledge, proficiency, perceptions, and reflections. Questions were Likert-style, multiple choice, or free-response. Piloted on REDCap in September 2024, the 5-10 minute survey was distributed nationally via an electronic link. Reminder emails and notifications were sent in November and January. It employed a mixed-methods analysis: quantitative data was summarized with descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were coded in Excel for recurrent themes.

RESULTS

Of 113 eligible participants, 91 completed the anonymous survey; 80% did not have a disability, and 54% had a close friend or family member with one. Most medical students feel unprepared to care for patients with disabilities, despite 59% receiving some disability-related education. Of 76 respondents detailing accommodations they would provide patients, only 26.7% felt comfortable accommodating exams or visits for PWDs, and 87% wanted more disability medical training from their schools. Research found that existing curricula mainly focus on health disparities and barriers, leaving gaps in areas such as self-advocacy and disability benefits. Despite a majority receiving disability education in medical school, more than 50% of students have never heard about transition care and models of disability.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the need to expand disability education for medical students. Current medical curricula do not prepare students to treat PWDs and focus on negative aspects of disability. Future research should assess particular aspects of current medical curricula that can be improved and gauge accommodations students would provide.

Statement of Disclosures

None

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