Examine the Doctor-Patient Relationship: Clinical Rotations and Healthcare Delivery for LGBT Patients

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**Background:** Health care disparities related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) patients are of growing interest. LGBT patients face distinct health issues and research suggests that many physicians feel unprepared to holistically care for LGBT patients. Studies have demonstrated that in comparison to heterosexual patients, LGB patients either received substandard care or were denied care due to their sexual orientation. The purpose of the study is to determine 3\(^{rd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) year Osteopathic medical students’ ability to competently care for LGBT patients. We hypothesized that 4\(^{th}\) years, as well as female students, would display a more holistic approach to LGBT patients than their third year and male counterparts. We didn’t anticipate differences between Osteopathic medical schools.

**Methods:** Invitations were sent to all osteopathic medical schools to participate in a study aimed to determine LGBT acceptance and healthcare delivery. Students were asked to take an anonymous web-based survey. Consent was obtained when the participant accessed the survey. All scales used in the study were used with permission and have been used in multiple studies. A total of 533 3\(^{rd}\) and 4th years accessed the survey.

**Results:** When asked how often students treated self-reported LGBT patients differently than heterosexual patients, 4\(^{th}\) year students were more likely to provide substandard care to their LGBT patients in comparison to their 3\(^{rd}\) year counterparts \((p = .019)\). In addition, male students reported treating their LGBT identified patients differently in comparison to their female counterparts \((p = .005)\). When taking a sexual history, students are instructed to ask their patients, "Do you have sex with men, women, or both?" Only 24.2% (n=129) responded always/often, 25.7% (n=137) responded sometimes, and 45% (n=240) responded rarely/never. Third years were significantly less likely to ask their patients this question compared to their fourth year counterparts \((p = .003)\). In addition, statistically significant differences appeared to exist between the six Osteopathic schools \((p = .002)\).

**Conclusion:** It is evident that disparities exist in the way Osteopathic medical students treat self-identified LGBT patients. In addition, it appears that students are reluctant to ask their patients about both sexual behavior and orientation, which may lead to an increased risk of making heteronormative assumptions. These assumptions could be detrimental to the healthcare of LGBT patients and hinder the doctor-patient relationship.

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