LGBTQ Acceptance in Osteopathic Medical Schools

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Background: Studies have suggested that LGBT acceptance is directly related to the academic success of LGBT students. As such, creating a LGBT friendly environment could improve LGBT Osteopathic medical student’s educational outcomes. In addition, research has also suggested that many physicians feel comparatively unprepared to holistically care for the LGBT population and that disparities exist in the health care of these patients. Thus, improving LGBT awareness within Osteopathic medical schools should result in creating more culturally competent DO physicians who can more effectively care for their LGBT patients. The purpose of the study was to determine the LGBT acceptance, treatment attitudes, and medically relevant knowledge in osteopathic medical students.

Methods: E-mail invitations to participate in the current study were sent to all US osteopathic medical schools in August 2012. Participating students completed an anonymous web-based survey, and informed consent was obtained when accessing the survey. The survey was designed specifically for this study but contained scales used with permission from previously published research.

Results: Of the 1698 participants from 6 schools that started the survey, only 1334 (78.6%) completed it. Approximately 85% of respondents self-identified as heterosexual only. In general, respondents had both positive general attitudes and treatment attitudes about the LGBT population. However, general attitudes ($P<.001$) and treatment attitudes ($P<.001$) were more positive among self-identified LGBT students. When assessing LGBT medically relevant knowledge, only 12.9% of respondents obtained a passing score, and LGBT students scored significantly higher than heterosexual only students ($P=.01$). There were differences in levels of LGBT acceptance ($P=.008$), treatment attitudes ($P=.001$), and medical knowledge ($P=.05$) between respondents from the 6 schools.

Conclusions: Results suggested that osteopathic medical students mostly had positive attitudes and treatment approaches about LGBT patients, but some disparities were still present. Students also lacked adequate knowledge of LGBT medical issues. In the future, students should be given more training in order to treat LGBT patients and their health-related issues.

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