Student Perspectives on Diversity in Podiatric Medical Education

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Background

- Diversity within the podiatric medical school educational experience has been a neglected topic. While of important consequence, formal inquiry has been limited.
- The purpose of the present study was to formally represent the opinions of current podiatric medical students.

Introduction

- The benefits of diversity have been acknowledged in a variety of educational settings, particularly medical school education.
- It has been suggested that diversity strengthens the learning environment, improves learning outcomes, and helps students prepare for a diverse patient population[1]. Nonetheless, there has been a lack of formal inquiry into the perspectives on diversity among podiatric medical students.
- The purpose of the present study was to formally represent the opinions of podiatric medical students on diversity. It was hypothesized that while attitudes towards diversity are likely positive, certain opinions may be more varied.
- The goal was to help foster improved opinions on diversity among podiatric medical students.

Methods

- An online survey was developed, based largely on a previously validated diversity survey for health professions students. The survey was distributed to the student body of a single podiatric medical college via Qualatrics in May of 2020.

- **Student responses at WesternU reflected the opinion that diversity is of value and can improve the learning environment.**
- **Nonetheless, *negative speech or behaviors were commonly encountered.* 21% of respondents had personally experienced racial discrimination on campus and just over a quarter had witnessed racial discrimination (16 out of 58; 27.5%).**
- **Understanding student perspectives is helpful to foster diversity in the podiatric medical college setting.**

Table 1. Frequency of hearing discouraging remarks heard by others students/resident physicians, faculty; n (percentage).

	Frequency of hearing discouraging remarks by other students/resident physicians.			
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
People whose second language is English	16 (29.1%)	12 (21.8%)	6 (10.9%)	21 (38.2%)
People that have strong beliefs in religion	21 (38.9%)	11 (20.4%)	16 (29.6%)	6 (11.1%)
People of low socioeconomic status	22 (39.3%)	19 (33.9%)	10 (17.9%)	5 (8.9%)
People that have a disability	26 (48.2%)	19 (35.2%)	6 (11.1%)	3 (5.6%)
People who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender	25 (45.5%)	17 (30.9%)	10 (18.2%)	3 (5.5%)
People of ethnic minority backgrounds	25 (45.5%)	14 (25.5%)	12 (21.8%)	4 (7.3%)
Women	19 (33.9%)	12 (21.4%)	16 (28.6%)	9 (16.1%)
	Frequency of hearing discouraging remarks by faculty.			
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
People whose second language is English	27 (50.9%)	13 (24.5%)	11 (20.8%)	2 (3.8%)
People that have strong beliefs in religion	31 (58.5%)	16 (30.2%)	4 (7.6%)	2 (3.8%)
People of low socioeconomic status	30 (60.0%)	14 (28.0%)	4 (8.0%)	2 (4.0%)
People that have a disability	30 (58.9%)	17 (33.3%)	2 (3.9%)	2 (3.9%)
People who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender	30 (57.7%)	14 (26.9%)	5 (9.6%)	3 (5.8%)
People of ethnic minority backgrounds	27 (51.9%)	16 (30.8%)	7 (13.5%)	2 (3.9%)
Women	25 (47.2%)	16 (30.2%)	8 (15.1%)	4 (7.6%)

Results

- Distributed to 132 students, 58 students (43.9%) completed the survey. Overall, students acknowledged the importance and potential value of diversity in the podiatric medical college setting.
- Nearly 80% of students agreed that “strongly focusing on cultural diversity will result in campus unification of the student body and acceptance” (46 of 58; 79.3%).
- Still, nearly one-third of respondents (19 of 58, 32.8%) felt that efforts to recruit and retain minority students were inadequate.
- Furthermore, students commonly encountered negative speech or behaviors: under a quarter of respondents had personally experienced racial discrimination on campus (12 of 58; 20.9%) and just over a quarter had witnessed racial discrimination (16 out of 58; 27.5%).

Discussion

- Student responses reflected the opinion that diversity is of value and can improve the learning environment.
- Nonetheless, negative speech or behaviors were commonly encountered. Students were unsure that efforts to recruit and retain minority students were adequate, and were unsure that diversity specifically improved the quality of their own education.
- Understanding student perspectives is helpful to foster diversity in the podiatric medical college setting.

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