LGBTQ+ Attitudes and Experiences of Podiatric Medical Students

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INTRODUCTION

LGBTQ+ students in U.S. medical school systems continue to face discrimination, hostile environments, and microaggressions as they progress through their programs[1-3]. For example, transgender and nonbinary physicians who had completed their fellowships stated that they were fearful of "losing it all" if they had disclosed their gender to their colleagues before completing their program[4].

Podiatric medical students have not been represented in studies regarding issues affecting gender and sexual minorities, such as students' feelings of preparedness and willingness to treat patients from the LGBTQ+ community. Another unexplored area revolves around students' perspectives in disclosing their own sexual orientation, micro- or macro-aggressions suffered due to their identity, and overall need for more LGBTQ+ centered education.

This study represents a first effort towards filling this gap in knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ issues. The purpose of this study is to reveal the attitudes and knowledge that podiatric students at Western University of Health Science have about LGBTQ+ persons, and to explore ways that the university can support students in providing quality care for future LGBTQ+ patients.

METHODS

- A total of 73 students participated and 55 student responses met the criteria to be included in this study.
- The survey done by Nama et al. was used as a basis for the design of the present study.
- The survey was developed and published using **Qualtrics** and distributed to all podiatric medical students enrolled as of May 2020 at Western University's College of Podiatric Medicine.
- A link to the survey was also published on social media platforms to encourage students to participate.
- Demographic and question analysis were conducted on **Excel.**

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

- Research questions using a **Likert scale** were analyzed by determining their median and interquartile ranges.
- A **Mann-Whitney U-Test** was used for analysis as the data is nonparametric, ordinal, and non-continuous to compare attitudes on LGBTQ+ related statements in older vs. younger participants (≤25 years old vs. ≥26 years old).

The consensus among podiatric medical students at WesternU is that **LGBTQ+ persons are viewed in a positive light**.

However, **LGBTQ+ prejudice is common**, as 54.5% of participants witnessed at least one negative comment against LGBTQ+ individuals made by peers and residents.

Most WesternU students want and would benefit from **more training** on ways to create a safe environment for their LGBTQ+ patients.

Student Reported Exposure to Discouraging Remarks About People Who Identify as LGBTQ+

Frequency	Count of how frequently you have heard discouraging remarks by faculty about people who identify as LGBTQ+	Count of how frequently you have heard discouraging remarks from residents or students about people who identify as LGBTQ+
More Than Once	12.73%	21.82%
Once	23.64%	32.73%
Never	56.36%	45.45%
Didn't Answer	7.27%	0%

Steps That Programs Could Take to Create a More Accepting Environment for LGBTQ+ Students

More Offer additional training/ education around LGBTQ issues (i.e., sexual orientation, gender identity, inclusiveness, respect)	58%
Promote the usage of LGBTQ friendly language and images	51%
Make public the steps that your program is taking to make the school a more LGBTQ friendly space	42%
Offer services specific to LGBTQ students (i.e., a student counselor to deal with LGBTQ concerns and complaints)	14%

RESULTS

- Most students agreed that their colleagues speak positively of and support LGBTQ+ persons.
- Collectively, 36.4% of students reported to have witnessed at least once negative commentary by a faculty member regarding LGBTQ+ individuals and 54.5% by peers and residents.
- The attitudes about LGBTQ+ individuals did not differ between those who are age ≥26 and those age ≤ 25 (p >.05).
- 40% (n=22/55) of the students reported being not fully open about their sexual orientation and/or gender.
- 11% of the students reported feeling uncomfortable listing LGBTQ+ volunteer activities in their resume.
- Integration of workshops was the most popular option among WesternU podiatric medical students.

DISCUSSION

- Though students around campus witness discrimination of LGBTQ+ students perpetuated by peers and others, the consensus remains that LGBTQ+ persons are viewed in a positive light. These mixed data may be a result of participants responding in a socially desirable way, which was not accounted for in the study.
- Podiatric medical students recognize the need for change and show a desire to move the field towards becoming more inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Updated curriculum, intentional language (in person and on paper), and supplemental workshops will be crucial in taking steps towards positive change.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Include questions regarding respondent's identification within the LGBTQ+ community to compare LGBTQ+ medical students vs. non-LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Future research will need to account for socially desirable responding to obtain a more accurate picture of the LGBTQ+ attitudes and experiences of podiatric medical students.
- The study should expand to include all nine accredited podiatric medical schools.

In memory of our professor and mentor: David Shofler, DPM

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