

Medical Faculty Beliefs: Self-Rated Importance and Confidence in Teaching Geriatrics Primary Care

KEY FINDINGS: Medical faculty are comfortable teaching topics that are commonly associated with primary care. However, they are less confident teaching more specialized topics, such as sensory or cognitive impairment, driving safety, and sleep disorders.

BACKGROUND

Previous research has shown that about a third of adults 65 and older will need care from a geriatrician in the future. However, the U.S. medical education system doesn't require clinical training in how to understand, diagnose, and treat the health conditions most common in older adults. This means that many older adults are being treated by family medicine or internal medicine practitioners who may have limited knowledge of their medical needs.

In 2015, the federal government created the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP), a \$38 million dollar grant program to train health care providers to address the needs of older adults and develop community-based programs to improve the quality of care for older adults.

An overall goal of the GWEP was to highlight possible areas of improvement in how geriatrics was being integrated into medical school curriculum.

Researchers from the University of South Florida conducted this study to understand medical school faculty attitudes about the content areas that are

key to the medical assessment and treatment of older adults.

Some examples of these areas are, talking about and explaining prescribed medications, identifying and managing sleep problems, and evaluating and managing health and vision problems.

STUDY METHOD

A total of 82 university medical faculty completed a survey, rating each of 25 content areas from 1 (low) to 10 (high) on three things – the content area's importance; their knowledge of the area; and their confidence in teaching it.

An expert panel of nine practicing health professionals and geriatrics experts created the survey based on their research and expertise.

FINDINGS

Most Important Topics

The medical faculty respondents ranked the following as *the three most important* related to the primary care of older adults:

- Explain things to patients in an easy-to-understand way about what to do or how to take care of their illnesses or health conditions
- Talk about and explain all medications prescribed
- Take an age-appropriate patient history and perform a physical assessment

The areas mentioned above were also the three content areas the medical faculty felt most confident in teaching.

Least Important Topics

The following content areas were ranked as *least important in teaching*:

- Identify and manage sexual dysfunction
- Evaluate and manage hearing and vision impairment
- Identify and manage sleep problems

Least Confident in Teaching

The following were ranked as areas the *faculty were least confident in teaching*:

- Evaluate and manage hearing and vision impairment
- Identify at-risk drivers and recommend appropriate counseling
- Identify and manage sleep disorders

Only importance and confidence were reported because scores on knowledge were highly correlated with scores on confidence. Overall, medical faculty were comfortable with topics typically part of primary care practice. They were less comfortable with more specialized topics, such as sensory or cognitive impairment and driving.

The results also found that when faculty were confident about teaching an area, they also deemed that area to be the most important.

Similarly, some of the areas they were least confident about were also areas they chose as least important

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These results indicate that medical faculty who teach geriatrics primary care have strong preferences about what medical students should master.

The study authors recommend that medical faculty work with specialists to teach topics they are less confident about. They highlighted the importance of working with specialists who have expertise in neurocognitive and psychiatric disorders.

Specialists also could consult on areas that may be misunderstood, such as sexual dysfunction and driving impairment and safety.

By teaching about the topics concerning older patients' needs, medical professionals who educate aspiring doctors could lay the groundwork for improved geriatrics care in the future.

- Amy Haywood

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