Perceptions of Cultural Competency among UF Medical Students

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Abstract

It is hard to find an area, within the United States that maintains a homogenous population, and therefore the need for cultural competence is one of the most important developments in the American health care system. Accreditation standards set by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) specify two cultural competence guidelines. The first guideline states that “medical students should learn to recognize and appropriately address gender and cultural biases in health care delivery, while considering the health of the patient” and second, “the faculty and students must demonstrate an understanding of the manner in which people of diverse cultures and belief systems perceive health and illness and respond to various symptoms, diseases, and treatments.” The purpose of this exploratory study is to conduct semi-structured interviews with University of Florida (UF) medical students in order to assess how students differ in their perceptions and experiences of cultural competency. A total of 14 students decided to participate in the semi-structured interviews and the following themes emerged from the discussions: (1) medical students were able to provide textbook definitions of cultural competency, (2) uncertainty about how to connect behaviors or clinical skills to discussions regarding cultural competency, (3) inability to think through the process of how communication skills may relate to cultural competency education, (4) agreement that medical students can benefit from cultural competency education and finally (5) patient panels and real world experience are the best methods to learn about cultural competency for medical students at UF.