Assessing the Learning Environment at the University of Michigan Medical School Through a National Collaboration

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The Learning Environment Study

The University of Michigan is one of 28 medical schools in the U.S. and Canada that are part of the Innovative Strategies for Transforming the Education of Physicians (ISTEP) at the American Medical Association.

The Learning Environment Study (LES) examines the undergraduate medical education environment as a longitudinal survey using many established measures of student attitudes, personalities, and perceptions.

University of Michigan has 122 students participating in the class of 2014 and 109 in the class of 2015: participation rates of 81% and 73% respectively.

Here are some measures gathered during students’ first year of medical school.

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of 2014</th>
<th>Class of 2015</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-white</td>
<td>42%</td>
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from rural/small town

have a physician in the immediate family

at orientation, felt more than adequately prepared for medical school

number: 122

Discussion

There is a lot of diversity in participants’ attitudes and perceptions.

- Tolerance for ambiguity and the ways of coping subscales have very wide variance.
- Overall, students have high empathy scores and are only slightly patient-oriented.
- Overall, students perceive the University of Michigan Medical School positively.

These results will be compared with other medical schools to give a better picture of how to improve the learning environment to facilitate clinical learning with less distraction and stress.

Measures

The Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy

The S-Version of the JSPE measures how much a student believes that attention to patients’ thoughts and emotions is an important part of clinical skill and effective treatment.

Scores can range from 16 to 112.

Higher scores indicate more belief that patients’ thoughts and emotions are clinically relevant.

Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale

The TAMS measure how comfortable a student feels with open situations and goals involving ambiguity, ambivalence, or undefined causes, and no correct answer.

Scores can range from 16 to 912.

Higher scores indicate more comfort with ambiguous situations and goals.

Patient-Physician Orientation Scale

The PPOS measures how much the student feels that patients should direct and control a clinical interaction.

Scores can range from 15 to 148.

Higher scores indicate the patient should control clinical interactions.

Ways of Coping Scale

The ICQ is a 12 item measure that examines how much each individual follows what attention to patients’ thoughts and emotions is an important part of clinical skill and effective treatment.

Scores can range from 16 to 112.

Higher scores indicate more belief that patients’ thoughts and emotions are clinically relevant.

The Learning Environment Study will continue to follow these students to explore which aspects of medical school are most beneficial for which sorts of students.

The environment of the school

Students have difficulty finding time for family and friends.

Students gather together for informal activities.

Students in school get too distant from each other.

Students are reluctant to share with each other problems they are having.

Competition for grades is intense.

Students spend time assisting each other.

Upper-level students provide informal guidance to lower-level students.

Faculty, administrators and staff give personal help to students having academic difficulty.

Students hesitate to express their ideas and opinions to faculty.

Students are reluctant to share with each other problems they are having.

Exams emphasize understanding of concepts.

Courses emphasize the interdependence of facts, concepts and principles.

The relationship between basic science and clinical material is unclear.

Exams provide a fair measure of student achievement.

The Medical School Learning Environment Survey

never rarely sometimes often very often

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