

Assessing Changes in Medical Students' Expectations Towards Aging After Completing a Geriatric Clerkship

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INTRO

- Ageism is “discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes.”
- Ageism contributes to health disparities and differences in health outcomes. According to the WHO, this is the most pervasive and socially accepted form of discrimination.

METHODS

1. Required 4-week geriatric clerkship for medical students in the 4th year.
2. Medical students complete online modules on mental health and dementia that explore ageism and bias.
3. Data was collected using the shortened version of the Expectations Regarding Aging (ERA-12) Survey (Sarkisian et al., 2005)
 - Three scales: Physical Health, Mental Health, Cognitive Function
4. Examined relative frequencies for each ERA-12 item and conducted a paired t-test on summed scores for the three scales.

RESULTS

- The mean on the Physical Health scale significantly increased from the pre-training assessment to the post-training assessment and Mental Health was trending toward significance.
- For all items on the Physical Health and Mental Health scales, fewer participants indicated the item was true on the post-assessment compared to the pre-assessment.
- For all items on the Cognitive Function scale, more participants indicated the item was true on the post-assessment compared to the pre-assessment.

DISCUSSION

- Healthcare professionals need to understand the existing gaps in health equity that older adults experience because of ageist attitudes. By drawing attention to implicit and explicit biases towards aging through the geriatric clerkship, we were able to decrease stigmatizing attitudes toward physical and mental health. Future efforts should be focused in the area of cognitive functioning.

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Medical students reported increased positive attitudes regarding physical health in aging upon completion of geriatric clerkship.



Pre-Training and Post-Training Frequencies

Scale	Item	Percentage Stating Definitely True or Somewhat True (Pre) N=86	Percentage Stating Definitely True or Somewhat True (Post) N=78
Physical Health	When people get older, they need to lower their expectations of how healthy they can be.	44.19%	24.36%
Physical Health	The human body is like a car: when it gets old, it gets worn out.	76.74%	61.54%
Physical Health	Having more aches and pains is an accepted part of aging.	70.93%	60.26%
Physical Health	Every year that people age, their energy levels go down a little more.	54.65%	41.03%
Mental Health	I expect that as I get older I will spend less time with friends and family.	18.60%	15.38%
Mental Health	Being lonely is just something that happens when people get old.	19.77%	14.10%
Mental Health	Quality of life declines as people age.	40.70%	30.77%
Mental Health	It's normal to be depressed when you are old.	10.47%	7.69%
Cognitive Function	I expect that as I get older I will become more forgetful.	72.09%	83.33%
Cognitive Function	It's an accepted part of aging to have trouble remembering names.	48.84%	71.79%
Cognitive Function	Forgetfulness is a natural occurrence just from growing old.	61.63%	70.51%
Cognitive Function	It is impossible to escape the mental slowness that happens with age.	41.86%	43.59%

Paired T-Test Results

44 medical students completed both the pre-training assessment and the post-training assessment.

Scale	Pre-Training Mean	Post-Training Mean	P-value
Physical Health	9.86	10.45	0.047
Mental Health	12.75	13.30	0.095
Cognitive Function	10.09	9.57	0.118

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