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Title: *Assessment of the change in student empathy scores after completion of the first professional year of pharmacy school*

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to assess empathy development within the new curriculum for students at the SIUe School of Pharmacy The new curriculum was introduced in the fall semester of 2018. This study focused on changes from baseline (beginning of first professional year), to the completion of their first professional year.

Methods: A modified version of the Jefferson Scale of Empathy-Health Professional Students Version was utilized to assess student empathy. In addition to items assessing empathy, demographic information including age (18-25, 26-39, 40+), ethnicity, gender, and employment status in a healthcare field was collected. The tool our survey was based on was originally designed for medical students and later verified for both nursing and pharmacy students. In order to track individual changes, each participant created an anonymous unique identifier that was used in each administration of the survey. Of the twenty questions administered in the survey, ten were negatively coded and were reverse-scored during analysis. The survey instrument was designed to measure empathy levels as a whole, with all questions weighted equally. Higher scores on the survey indicate higher levels of empathy. The survey was first administered in the fall semester 2018 to first-year professional students (P1's) during their first week of class. An identical survey was administered early in the first semester of their second professional year. Surveys were conducted during class time with the permission of the course faculty. Faculty were not present during the administration of the survey.

Results: Eighty-one students responded to and completed the pre-survey, giving a response rate of 98.8%. Seventy-three students responded to the Fall 2019 survey giving a response rate of 86.9%. There was a total maximum possible score of 140 points. The total mean score for the baseline survey (Fall 2018) was 111 points out of 140 (SD = 10.5). The total mean score for the Fall 2019 survey was 114 points out of 140 (SD = 11.8). A two-tailed student T-Test was done comparing baseline composite scores to scores after completing one professional year which resulted in a value of 0.21 ($p > 0.05$).

Conclusion: The administration of this survey was successful in tracking changes in empathy scores compared to baseline for second professional year students. Based on the results of this survey, first-year pharmacy students did not display a statistically significant increase in levels of empathy. This cohort will continue to be followed through their progression in the curriculum.