

Implementing an Interactive Introduction to Complementary Medicine for Chronic Pain Management into the Medical School Curriculum

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Abstract

Background

In the setting of the opioid crisis, the management of chronic pain requires new approaches and more open dialogue between physicians and patients to explore evidence-based non-pharmacologic treatments. As part of a larger curriculum on health equity and social justice, we developed a new educational session on the role of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for chronic pain management.

Methods

Students and faculty collaborated to develop a novel educational session for second-year medical students consisting of a lecture followed by an experiential small group session immersing the students into one form of CAM. We conducted pre- and post-surveys to assess the students' self-reported learning and impressions of the session, and analyzed the responses using descriptive statistics and unpaired two sample t-tests.

Results

Over the academic years of 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, a total of 345 second-year medical students participated in this mandatory session. Students expressed statistically significant increases in their knowledge, comfort in counseling, and familiarity with financial costs and health equity issues associated complementary medicine practices after completing the session. They expressed an interest complementary medicine as a part of undergraduate medical education and offered insight into improvements for future iterations.

Conclusion

Our survey results indicate that the session met the educational objectives. A critical part of improving our session between academic years involved gathering feedback and implementing changes based on these suggestions. Our model is easy to implement and replicate at medical schools across the country. Future studies should assess the effects of CAM-focused educational interventions on practices in the clinical setting.