Understanding Medical Students’ Beliefs on Abortion and Sexual Reproduction

Maria Jarkowiec MSIII, Seema Kakar MD, Julia Frank MD, Gisela Butera MLIS
The George Washington University, School of Medicine and Health Sciences

BACKGROUND: As a controversial topic in American society, abortion occupies a precarious place in medical school curricula. Although medical students believe abortion is a valid and acceptable topic, fewer than 20% of U.S. medical schools offer formal abortion education in either the pre-clinical or clinical years. Only 40% provide abortion lectures during clerkships.

According to the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics, student learning objectives, abortion education should be included at a minimum in the third year core clerkship. In the absence of published curricula, professional health schools must develop their own methods to teach the medical aspects of the subject, while respecting all points of view.

PURPOSE: This research presents a reproducible structure for addressing both medical and ethical considerations in educating pre-clinical students about abortion.

METHODS: Second year medical students enrolled in Practice of Medicine, Problem Oriented Case-Based Learning (PCL) attended a required ethics lecture, during which they used an audience response system to answer questions. Their answers were tabulated to measure the range of student opinions. Students were then invited to post questions to the library blog.

ETHICS: Students were asked to complete a survey as part of routine curriculum evaluation and invited to post reflections about abortion issues to a monitored Blackboard Discussion Board. Though allowed to post anonymously, ground rules required them to adhere to basic standards of professionalism.

CONCLUSION: Case-based learning, a framing lecture, and a safe place to express and challenge opinions together constitute an effective strategy for introducing a controversial topic in medical education.

FUTURE: We plan to implement the same curriculum next year and conduct a similar survey and focus group to assess the stability of these results.

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References