The Attitudes of Canadian Ophthalmology Residents and Pre-Clerkship Medical Students at an Ontario Medical School Towards Homeless Individuals: A Cross-Sectional Study

Aman P. Sayal MPH¹, Marko M. Popovic MD², Majd Mustafa MD³, Stephen W. Hwang MD, MPH⁴, Myrna Lichter MD²
¹University of Toronto, Faculty of Medicine ²University of Toronto, Department of Ophthalmology and Vision Sciences ³McGill University, Department of Ophthalmology and Vision Sciences ⁴St. Michael’s Hospital, MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions.

INTRODUCTION:
• Homeless individuals are 4X more likely to be visually impaired and are less likely to access ophthalmic care than the general population
• This could be because homeless individuals feel stigmatized, shamed and unwelcomed by members of the health care system
• This is concerning because implicit biases impact the quality of clinical care
• The objective of this research study was to investigate the attitudes of Canadian ophthalmology residents (PGY1-PGY5) and pre-clerkship medical students (year 1 and year 2) at University of Toronto towards homeless individuals

METHODS (INSTRUMENT):
• Medical students and residents were sent the Health Professionals’ Attitudes Towards the Homeless Inventory (HPATHI) (Fig. 1)
• The HPATHI was 9 ‘Attitude’ items, 5 ‘Interest’ items and 4 ‘Confidence’ items
• Participants were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)
• For the purposes of our study, a score of 1-2 was considered a negative perception, 3 a neutral perception and 4-5 a positive perception

RESULTS (PARTICIPATION):
Fig. 2 HPATHI Response Rate

RESULTS (MAIN & SUB GROUP ANALYSIS):
• Compared to medical students, ophthalmology residents had significantly more negative ‘attitudes’ (pre-clerk median=4.4, resident median=4.1, both indicating positive attitudes) and ‘interests’ (pre-clerk median=4.0, resident median=3.3, residents with more neutral interests)
• Considering both statistical tests, Ophthalmology residents were more negative in 7/9 ‘Attitude’ items, 5/5 ‘Interest’ items and 1/4 ‘Confidence’ items
• There was no statistical difference in any of the themes when comparing interns and junior residents to senior residents

CONCLUSIONS:
• Ophthalmology residents have more negative perceptions towards homeless individuals than pre-clerkship medical students, while the data are comparable within the residency program
• Work with academic leaders is needed to ensure greater exposure and advocacy in post-graduate education

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