Abstract

Background: Social determinants of health (SDOH) shape the conditions of a person’s daily life and include factors such as housing, occupation, education, safety, and income. While physicians are aware of the inequalities that exist in healthcare, not all physicians feel adequately able to address such concerns. Understanding factors that contribute to the development and perpetuation of inequities in health care must be developed at the medical education training level.

Objectives: Evaluate internal medicine residents’ understanding of SDOH and implement a curriculum on health disparities in order to improve their comfort in addressing social needs.

Methods: A survey regarding several aspects of SDOH were collected from the Rowan University/Jefferson Health for internal medicine residency program. A curriculum involving several didactic sessions was subsequently provided. A post-education survey was then administered to the same group to determine whether the curriculum had effectively addressed understanding of SDOH.

Results: Among 41 residents representing all three of training, 72% did not fully understand factors composing SDOH. Interestingly, 100% of residents have cared for patients with social factors as the primary cause of patient admission, but 90% were not at all comfortable addressing SDOH. This dropped to 5.9% after implementation of the curriculum, indicating that 94.1% now feel comfortable and better equipped to address SDOH.

Conclusions: Very few residents understand SDOH, while most agree that social factors play a major role in health. Education should come at or before the residency level with the goal of not only educate, but to empower physicians to care for their patients with a more holistic approach.

Discussion

Our objective was to assess the understanding of SDOH in our internal medicine program. We train at four different community hospitals across the state of New Jersey, with varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

A lack of education is a major reason why residents do not feel comfortable discussing social factors with patients. We have learned from previous experiences that residents feel unprepared to discuss SDOH due to a lack of education provided during their training.

The American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) guidelines recommend training on SDOH. However, not all programs are able to provide such training due to limited resources and time constraints.

We have found that our residents have limited exposure to SDOH during their training, with less than half of residents reporting that they have had any training on this topic. This lack of training has resulted in a significant gap in knowledge and understanding of SDOH.

Conclusion

Very few residents understand social determinants of health, although most agreed that social factors play a major role in health. The implementation of our curriculum improved residents’ awareness and understanding and is crucial for physicians to develop a better understanding of the community they will be serving. However, our objective was not simply adfication, but also empowerment to make improvements in both patient care and healthcare systems. It is important for healthcare professionals to have a deeper understanding of the factors that affect health, such as housing, education, and income. These factors can significantly impact the overall health of a patient. By addressing these social determinants, healthcare providers can better understand the needs of their patients and work to improve their health outcomes.

References