

Stepping Outside the Classroom: Increasing Medical Students' Confidence Caring for Patients with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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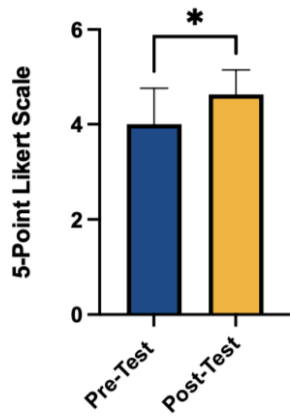
One in six children has one or more intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD)¹. Individuals with IDD experience significant healthcare disparities due to barriers such as ableism, inaccessible facilities, and inadequately trained providers. To better prepare future physicians to care for this population, some medical schools have implemented disability-health topics into their curriculum; however, most schools do not offer their students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience learning directly from the Disability community. To meet this need, we have created a service-learning opportunity that helps medical students enhance their skills in effective communication and adaptability when working with children and adults with IDD. This study assesses the impact of this community-based learning experience on medical students' confidence in working with this often-overlooked patient population.

Medical students at UC Riverside School of Medicine were invited to volunteer at Special Olympics MedFests, which are no-cost health fairs created to offer the physical exam that all athletes need before participating in Special Olympics. These events were led by volunteer physicians and medical students, providing a unique opportunity for medical trainees to gain increased experience with this patient population. While performing sports physicals, medical students practiced their communication skills, tailoring the conversation to fit each athlete's unique needs. Following the volunteer experience, participants were invited to complete a retrospective post-then-pre-questionnaire to assess their changes in confidence in working with patients with IDD following this hands-on experience. Pre- and post-surveys were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, and paired sample t-tests were performed. Additional survey questions evaluated the students' perceptions of disability education in their medical school curriculum and invited narrative feedback on the value of the volunteer experience.

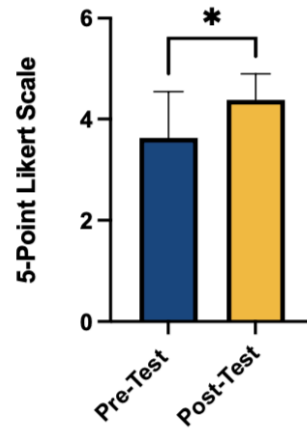
The results demonstrated a statistically significant increase in medical students' confidence in interacting with and providing medical care to individuals with IDD after participating in MedFest ($p < 0.05$; Figure 1). However, no significant change was observed in confidence related to communication skills. Additionally, 87.5% of participants agreed that medical students should receive more hands-on experience working with patients with IDD, and all participants (100%) indicated they would apply the skills learned at MedFest in their future medical practice (Figure 2).

This study highlights the value of hands-on community engagement in enhancing medical students' confidence in caring for patients with IDD. As a pilot study, our results support expanding partnerships between medical schools and local Special Olympics chapters to promote collaboration and improve disability-focused training. Future directions include increasing medical student participation in MedFest and integrating a didactic component to further develop communication skills and clinical preparedness.

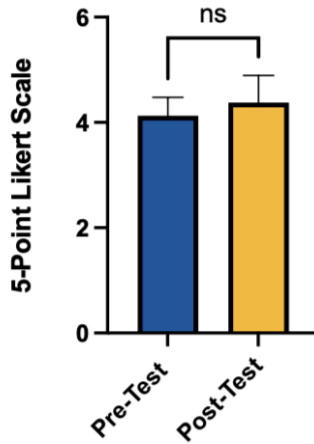
Confidence in my ability to interact with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Confidence in my ability to provide medical care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Confidence in my ability to communicate with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



I have reflected upon my own personal biases towards patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

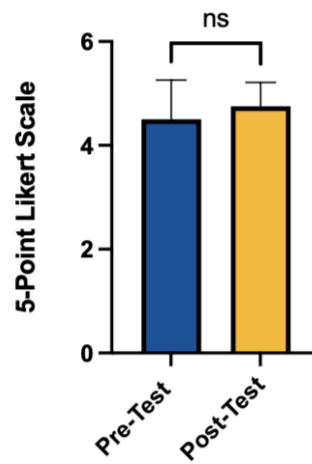
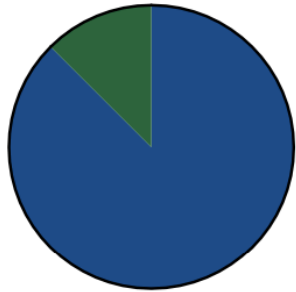


Figure 1: Paired sample t-tests between the pre-and post-survey mean confidence scores from MedFest surveys.

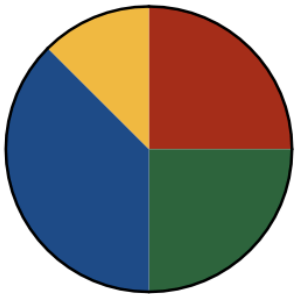
I believe that medical students should receive more hands-on experience working with patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



- Strongly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

Total=8

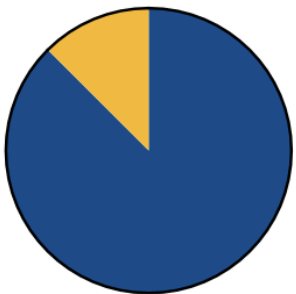
I believe that medical students receive adequate education on caring for patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



- Strongly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

Total=8

I will use the skills I have learned from volunteering at Special Olympics MedFest in my future medical practice/specialty.



- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

Total=8

Figure 2: Pie charts illustrating medical students' perceptions of their disability education in medical school and their anticipated application of skills learned at MedFest.

References:

1. Jenco, M. (2019). Study: 1 in 6 children has developmental disability. *AAP News*.
<https://www.aappublications.org/news/2019/09/26/disabilities092619>



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