Assessment of Physician Assistant Students’ Knowledge, Experiences, and Attitudes of Muslim Americans

According to the Institute of Medicine’s 2003 report, Unequal Treatment, sociocultural differences between patient and provider that are not appreciated, explored, understood, or communicated in the medical encounter results in poor adherence, poorer health outcomes, and racial/ethnic disparities in medical care. The American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) lists, “sensitivity to a diverse patient population”, as a competency of the PA profession. Perceptions of Muslims as terrorists are not uncommon. Public opinion polls have confirmed that negative perceptions of Muslims are on the rise. As an integral part of the health care team, PA’s must be trained as cultural competent clinicians.

To assess the cultural competence of PA students towards Muslim Americans in knowledge, experiences, and attitude.

Over 90% of physician assistant (PA) students correctly identified the religious book, head covering, and fasting holiday of Muslims.

Many PA students have been in group projects, studied with, and shared a meal with a Muslim American.

There were limited experiences with travelling to a Muslim dominant country, visiting a mosque, watching a documentary on the culture, or having lived with a Muslim.

Many agreed that PA programs should teach more about beliefs from other religions.

Most agreed that it is important for PA students to learn more about the Muslim religion.

Most generally felt comfortable interacting with Muslim Americans.

Healthcare providers’ diagnostic and treatment decisions are influenced by their perceptions and attitudes of patients’ race, religion, and sociocultural factors. The findings from this study suggest that PA education can be enhanced by providing more interactive intercultural opportunities to help promote consistency and equality in health care.