Perceptions of the Medical School Learning Environment in a Distributed Education Program: Identifying the Key Elements of Positive Learning Environments

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INTRODUCTION

• Schools are increasingly being held responsible for facilitating positive environments (CACMS, 2015).
• This study aims to develop a learning environment measure that is based on theory and student feedback, and is sensitive to identifying program site differences.

METHODS

Qualitative Component:
• 33 semi-structured interviews were conducted with year 1 through year 4 undergraduate medical students across the four program sites.
• Data analysis was done in NVivo and followed the conventions of template analysis.
• All data is being coded by two of the authors and the preparation of the final template is still in progress.

Quantitative Component:
• 2 pilot tests have been conducted to test and refine the survey.
  • 429 and 268 medical students responded to pilot tests 1 and 2, respectively.
  • The survey, called the Health Education Learning Environment Survey (HELES), currently contains 46 items and will undergo one more pilot test in May 2016.
  • The current dimensions in the HELES are: (1) supportive environment, (2) workload, (3) peer relationships, (4) faculty relationships, and (5) professional development.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Currently, the analysis of the qualitative data has identified two overarching themes related to a positive learning environment:
• An environment that is welcoming to students and in which they feel supported and safe to learn. Peers play an especially important role in the environment.
• An environment in which students feel engaged in the learning process. This engagement can occur via multiple methods.

Quantitative Results

NEXST STEPS

Qualitative Component: (1) Finalize qualitative template and (2) explore program site similarities and differences.
Quantitative Component: (1) Finalize HELES and (2) conduct a final validation study.

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