Credentials and Core Clerkships: Who’s training our PA Students (and does it matter)?

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Introduction

Supervised clinical practice experiences (SCPE) are the mainstay of a PA Program’s clinical phase. Evaluating the effectiveness of these experiences is one of the primary roles for the clinical education team. Per the ARC-PA accreditation standards, preceptors may be:

a) board certified physicians
b) PAs teamed with board certified physicians or
c) other licensed health care providers experienced in their area of instruction.

This study compares student-submitted, end-of-rotation evaluation scores for two discrete preceptor groups, MD/DO and APPs, to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in scoring between groups.

Results

43%

of PA student preceptors are Advanced Practice Providers (APPs)

Students Evaluate APP Preceptors Higher than MD/DO Preceptors

Conclusion

- The data suggest that overall evaluation scores were higher for APP preceptors compared to MD/DO preceptors but was not statistically significant except for one program.
- The PA profession is unique in that its trainees are often supervised in clinical experiences by non-PA clinicians. Although the majority of preceptors remain MD/DO, with the expansion of PA and NP programs nationally, there is an increase in number of potential APP clinician preceptors for students.
- Lastly, more research is needed to evaluate additional clerkships (including electives, women’s health and behavioral health) and PA programs located in other regions of the country.

Methods

- Retrospective data analysis
- SCPE data from three cohorts (2016-2018) from four PA programs (A, B, C, D)
- Different geographic regions, public and private institutions and those housed within or outside academic medical institutions.

Inclusion criteria were:

1) core rotations common across each of the programs (Family Medicine/Primary care, Internal medicine, Surgery, Pediatrics, Emergency medicine)
2) sites used a minimum of two times annually
3) Preceptor categories: MD/DO and APP (PA & NP)
4) Preceptor – provider who spent >50% with the student (1 point given)
   • If equal supervisory representation = 0.50 each
5) End-of-rotation evaluation descriptive and inferential data were analyzed using SPSS version 25

Overall evaluation scores (n=209) were higher for APP preceptors compared to MD/DO preceptors, but not found to be statistically significant.

Individual program analysis showed higher evaluation scores for APPs vs. MD/DOs in each of the core rotations with a statistically significant difference in program B (p=0.001).

References

- Dereczky A, Dewitt R. Informed Practice: Students’ Clinical Experiences in the Undergraduate Phase of an Accelerated Physician Assistant Program. JPAE. 2016; 27(2): 77-80.