Medical Student Attitudes and Understanding of Reproductive Health and Justice: An Institution-Wide Survey

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Introduction
Although 95% of people with uteruses in the US use contraception1,2, and 1 in 4 will have an abortion3, few studies assess medical student knowledge of and exposure to contraception and abortion during their training.

Materials and methods
An anonymous, online survey of all medical students at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (UWSMPH) assessed:
• educational experiences
• knowledge of reproductive healthcare topics
• support of reproductive justice (RJ) principles

Results
In total, 446 medical students responded (60% response rate) and 350 (47%) completed the survey.

Misperceptions about abortion and contraception were common:

- Progestin-only birth control methods affect risk of breast cancer: 30% agreed
- Emergency contraceptive pills work by causing abortion: 21% agreed

Medical students were not consistently exposed to related curricula:

- 41% reported didactic curriculum related to abortion
- 55% received “ethics content” about abortion

Most students agreed with RJ principles:

- Every woman should have the right to parent or not parent a child if she chooses. Agree 92%
- It is the responsibility of the health care system to ensure that every woman has access to a full range of contraceptive options. Agree 97%
- The health care system should play a role in helping every parent raise their children in a safe and healthy environment. Agree 97%

Conclusions
We found that medical students at UWSMPH:
• are not consistently exposed to curriculum about abortion or contraception
• have misperceptions about common reproductive health topics
• agree with RJ principles

Stigma may distort understanding of student perspectives and prevent curriculum changes. In order for trainees to provide care grounded in RJ, full spectrum non-judgmental reproductive health curricula must be incorporated into didactic and clinical medical education.

Literature cited
1. Daniels K, Mosher WD and Jones J, Contraceptive methods women have ever used: United States, 1982–2010, National Health Statistics Reports, 2013, No. 42

Acknowledgments
We thank those who worked on the survey of UWSMPH physician attitudes toward RJ for their inspiration of the current project. We also thank the medical students of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Reproductive Healthcare.

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