Abstract: Breastfeeding Education: An Approach to Educating First Year Medical Students

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Background: The long-term health impacts of breastfeeding has been well established globally, yet, its emphasis within medical school curriculum is limited. Medical school students can benefit from increased content exposure on breastfeeding to provide solid foundational knowledge and increased comfortability when discussing with future patients. This study is designed to assess the knowledge and perceptions of first year medical students utilizing questionnaires along with an educational session.

Methods: Using a pre and post-questionnaire design, we invited 42 first year medical students (M1) to explore the basics of breastfeeding to evaluate mastery of content and perception of a novel educational session. Prior to the session, students reviewed session objectives along with two brief articles addressing the physiology of lactation and prolactin.   During class, students completed the pre-exercise questionnaire, participated in a 40- minute educational session on the physiology, pathophysiology and importance of breastfeeding, followed by the post-exercise questionnaire.

Results: 100% of students present participated in the study. Students' knowledge scores on breastfeeding when evaluated on post questionnaires showed a statistically significant increase compared to the pre-questionnaires (n=15, p=0.007). There was no change in students' perceived level of importance of breastfeeding on long term outcomes. However, 100% of students increased their confidence in comfort level discussing breastfeeding with families after the activity.

Conclusion/Discussion: The long term benefits of breastfeeding to mothers and children has long been established. Yet despite the accepted implications to population health, the education curriculum for medical students and residents has been lacking in its presentation. Our results indicate that the inclusion of breastfeeding education in the first year is an effective way to convey pathophysiology and long term benefits. This education builds confidence in future physicians ability to discuss long term implications of human milk nutrition.   Incorporation of a small exposure, such as this, provides an opportunity for programs to address this critical gap in curriculum.