Barriers to Research Facing Health Professional Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

Given the demand on health professional students to complete research, it has become a standard requirement among both curricular and extracurricular activities.

For medical students specifically, the number of research experiences are growing from year to year and is strongly correlated to matching into residency programs.

We draw on our experience as medical students conducting research into melanoma of unknown primary to describe challenges faced and propose solutions so that future students will encounter fewer obstacles to their success.

Knowledge-Based Barriers

- Research mentorship
- Background research knowledge of research concepts
- Lack of time for both students and providers

Health professional students are faced with profound responsibilities when entering graduate schools. Students are at a serious disadvantage if they enter without experience in academic research, statistical analysis, or the logistics within a research timeline. Many students are expected to get involved with research but do not possess a solid background on where to begin or have a curricula providing a foundation. With no formal training in how to approach and navigate research projects, students and researchers are subjected to delays and significant time requirements in order to get research projects started.

In addition, limited access to faculty and researchers who could help health professional students gain a foundation in research concepts further prevents students from accessing research projects.

Given the rigorous academic demands of health professional students and extracurriculars, there is limited time for students to devote to research, despite it playing a crucial role in their professional development.

Proposed Solutions

Knowledge-Based Barriers

- Add research background to the curriculum and allot time for health professional students to participate in research.
- Create interest groups supported by research mentors who can help students navigate the nuances of joining research

Political Barriers

- Faculty at other institutions not being able to support students from other institutions

While there are many healthcare students eager to participate in research, there are circumstances in which collaborating with other institutions is beneficial for professional development. However, faculty and researchers are often unable to work with students from other institutions. It gives the impression that collaboration has more weight than competition.

Logistical Barriers

- Access to data and inability of students to do chart review studies
- Cross-institutional IRB approval and collaboration given students timeline
- Lack of in-person research and clinical opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Lack of research networking due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Additional to research required a cross-institutional IRB. IRB contracts must be approved before any research can begin. Obtaining this IRB can take months if a prior contract between institutions has not been previously established.

References