How Important Is Diversity to Students When Choosing a Physician Assistant Program?

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Introduction

- Myriad studies have documented the benefits of a diverse healthcare workforce for patient outcomes.
- The number of PA programs has grown rapidly, but growth in workforce diversity has been slow.
- PA programs are the gatekeepers to the profession, so recruiting diverse PA students is key to building diversity in the profession.
- PA program choice is influenced by a constellation of factors, but students who differ in demographics may also differ in what factors they value.
- Programs’ existing diversity may be especially important to minority students.
- With a focus on student gender and racial group, the current study investigated:

  Question 1: Does the likelihood of PA students considering program diversity differ based on student demographic characteristics?

  Question 2: Among students who considered program diversity, are their demographic characteristics associated with their ratings of the importance of program diversity?

References


Methods

Participants

- 3,882 recently matriculated PA students from 162 PA programs

Measures

- Key demographics:
  - Gender
  - Race, ethnicity → 3 racial groups
    - White: Non-Hispanic, single-race white
    - Asian: Non-Hispanic Asian (alone or in combination with white)
    - UR: Underrepresented minority in medicine
- Consideration of diversity attributes:
  - Did students consider (1) diverse student body and/or (2) diverse faculty when selecting PA programs (0 = No, 1 = Yes)
- Importance of diversity attributes:
  - Among students who considered (1) diverse student body and/or (2) diverse faculty when selecting PA program, how important was it that programs had each attribute (1 = Not important, 4 = Essential)
- Covariates:
  - Age at matriculation
  - Family financial help: Percentage of pre-PA education paid for by their families

Analytic Plan

- Reports of consideration of each diversity attribute were combined to create a measure of consideration of program diversity (0 = Did not consider either attribute, 1 = Considered at least 1 attribute)
- Reports of importance of each diversity attribute were loaded onto a latent factor representing the importance of program diversity

Question 1: Does the likelihood of PA students considering program diversity differ based on student demographic characteristics?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Female vs. male students rated program diversity as more important (β = .05, P &lt; .010)</th>
<th>Odds of female vs. male students considering program diversity were 28.2% higher (OR = 0.72 [0.60, 0.86], P &lt; .001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Racial group</td>
<td>Asian vs. white students consider program diversity were 132.0% higher (OR = 2.00 [1.53, 2.66], P &lt; .001)</td>
<td>Odds of Asian vs. UR students considering program diversity were not significantly different (OR = 0.86 [0.58, 1.28], P = .467)</td>
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Question 2: Among students who considered program diversity, are their demographic characteristics associated with their ratings of the importance of program diversity?

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<th>Gender</th>
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Summary

- More diverse PA programs may be particularly attractive to minority prospective PA students.
- Less diverse programs could emphasize resources that foster feelings of belongingness among minority recruits and prioritize hiring minority faculty.

PAEA would like to thank our PA student participants and the PA programs who facilitated data collection.

For more information, please contact the PAEA Research Team at research@PAEAnline.org