(W21) PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF A MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS EDUCATIONAL TRACK FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY STUDENTS
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Background: The Education and Scholarship Track in Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a unique collaboration between the University of North Carolina (UNC), Division of Physical Therapy (PT), and the Eastern North Carolina Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. The curriculum was created in response to a community need for physical therapists who have expertise in the management of the neurologic and psychosocial needs of patients living with MS. Objectives: The goal of the opportunity is to enhance the MS-related competencies of an annual cohort of Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students. The desired outcome is to graduate DPT students who have a skill competency base specific to MS. Methods: This 2-year educational track focuses on four key elements: didactic learning, clinical experiences, service, and advocacy. Students are provided the opportunity to tailor class projects to focus on issues that affect patients with MS. Clinical experiences provide opportunities to work with neurologists and researchers who have a primary focus on this population. Students participate in community service opportunities, including MS Society events, board meetings, and wellness programs. The track is evaluated through both qualitative and quantitative measures, including the MS Competencies Rating Scale, MS Activity Tracking Form, and qualitative feedback from scholarship recipients, patients, and interdisciplinary preceptors. Results: Preliminary evaluation outcomes indicate increased student competencies in MS-specific knowledge and skills. Student competencies indicate a change from a pre-program Likert scale rating of “below average” to a mid-program rating of “average” to “above average” in several domains. Qualitative results reflect positive student, patient, and provider feedback in areas of interdisciplinary collaboration and understanding of the benefits of PT. Conclusions: It is our goal that this curriculum will serve as an educational model for other universities seeking to advance the competencies of entry-level physical therapists to provide services for individuals diagnosed with MS.

Supported by: University of North Carolina (UNC-CH), Division of Physical Therapy, and Eastern North Carolina Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society

Disclosure: Nothing to disclose

Keywords: rehabilitation strategies and therapy and MS, service delivery in MS