

Medical Students' Knowledge and Opinion of the Affordable Care Act and Other Health Care Policy Issues

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Abstract

Today's medical students will play an integral role in the success of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This national project sent a survey to students at ten US medical school campuses, focusing on students' opinion of the ACA, knowledge of nine key ACA provisions, level of support of health care policies, feelings towards health care reform education, demographic information, political ideology, and intended specialty. Data analysis was performed using Pearson's Chi-square tests and multiple logistic regression models. A total of 2,761 out of 5,340 medical students (52%) responded to the survey, with 63% of students indicating support for the ACA, 75% indicating adequate understanding of the key ACA provisions, and 56% indicating professional obligation to assist in implementation of the ACA. Future surgeons and conservative students have less support of the ACA when compared to students entering primary care or identifying themselves as liberal or moderate. The most knowledgeable students of the ACA provisions were more likely to support and indicate professional obligation towards the ACA.

Introduction

Current physicians' opinions towards the ACA and other health care policies have been well documented, but there has been inadequate attention paid to the views of medical students on the subject matter. Current medical students will play a significant role in the implementation and augmentation of the ACA, but in order to advocate effectively, it is essential they are well-informed of the ACA and its key provisions. By surveying students from diverse institutions across the country, we can assess the overall understanding of the health care reform document and the provisions that will impact the way future physicians practice medicine. This study aims to discover if current medical students support the ACA, feel they have a professional obligation to assist in reform efforts, and have the necessary essential knowledge of the ACA for future reform success. We want to know if students feel adequately educated by their medical institution on health care reform and policy, as well as how students' views and knowledge of the ACA relate to their political ideology, medical school debt, desired future specialty, as well as demographic information.

Methods

Ten medical school campuses were chosen based on geographic location and mix of private and public institutions (Table 1). A total of 5,340 medical students were emailed the survey from April to June 2014. The survey had seven major sections, including student's opinion of the ACA, knowledge of key ACA provisions, opinions of six health care policies, level of agreement with seven health care policies and hypothetical situations, feelings on their medical intuitions role on health care reform education, demographic information, and a comment section. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess student opinions and a knowledge score was calculated based on student's correct answers to nine true/false knowledge questions. Pearson's Chi-square tests and multiple logistic regression models were used to test for independent associations between the key predictors and student's opinion of the ACA (Table 2).

Results

2,761 out of 5,340 medical students (52%) responded.

| Medical School | Percent |
|--------------------|---------|
| UMN Twin Cities | 13.94 |
| UMN - Duluth | 3.19 |
| Louisville | 9.16 |
| Cincinnati | 10.29 |
| Vanderbilt | 10.65 |
| UAZ - Phoenix | 5.54 |
| UAZ - Tucson | 5.47 |
| Colorado | 17.24 |
| Harvard | 14.52 |
| Hopkins | 7.75 |
| UMN not specified* | 1.34 |
| UAZ not specified* | 0.91 |

Table 1. Survey Completion by Medical Institution
* UMN or UAZ students with unspecified campus location

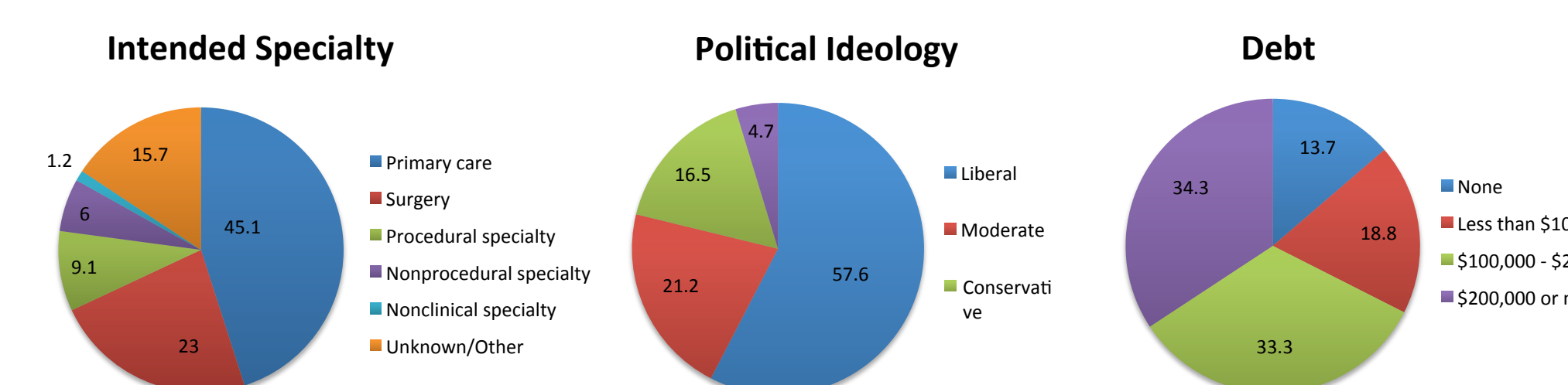


Figure 2. Medical Student Opinions Regarding the Affordable Care Act

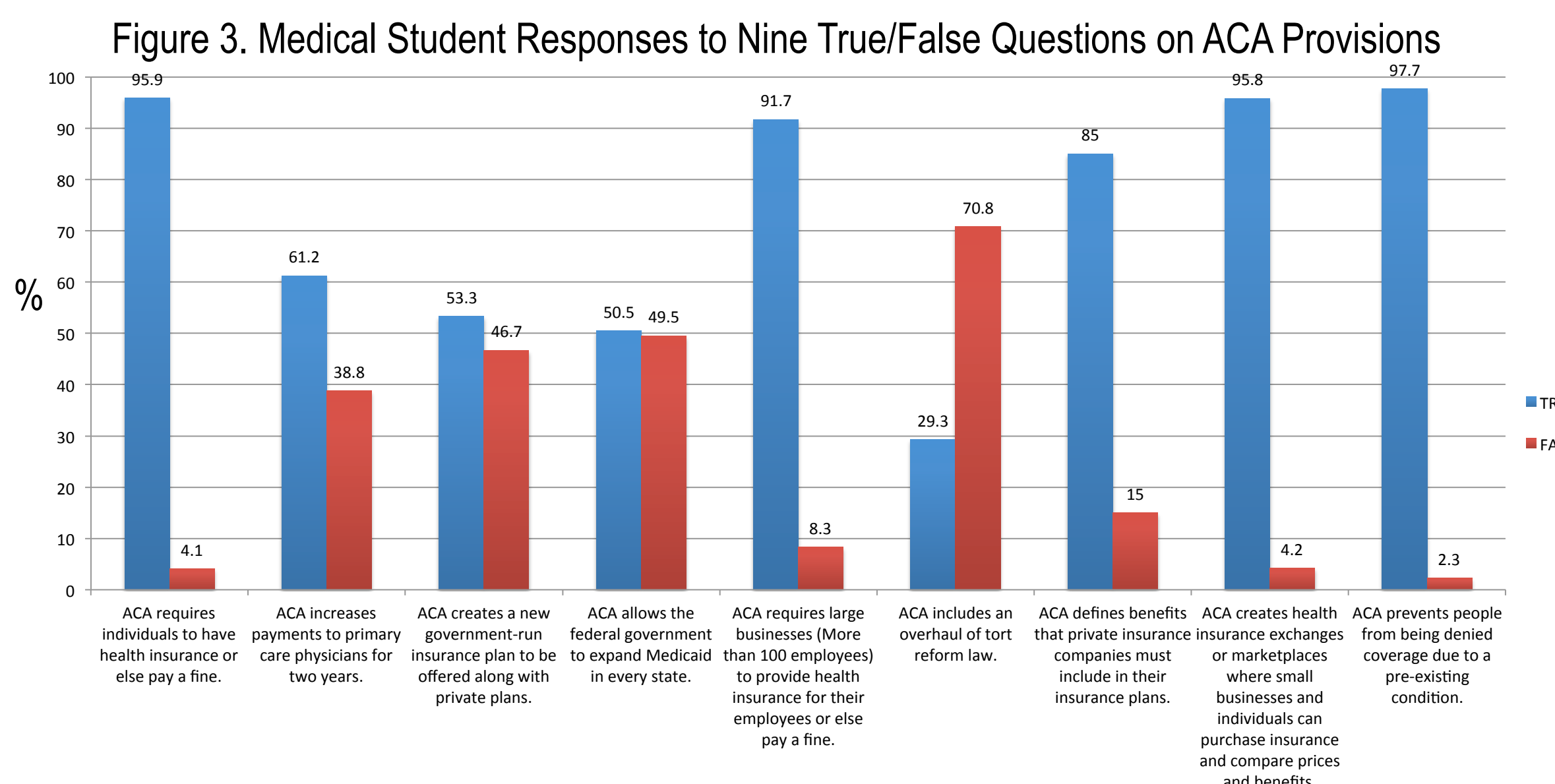
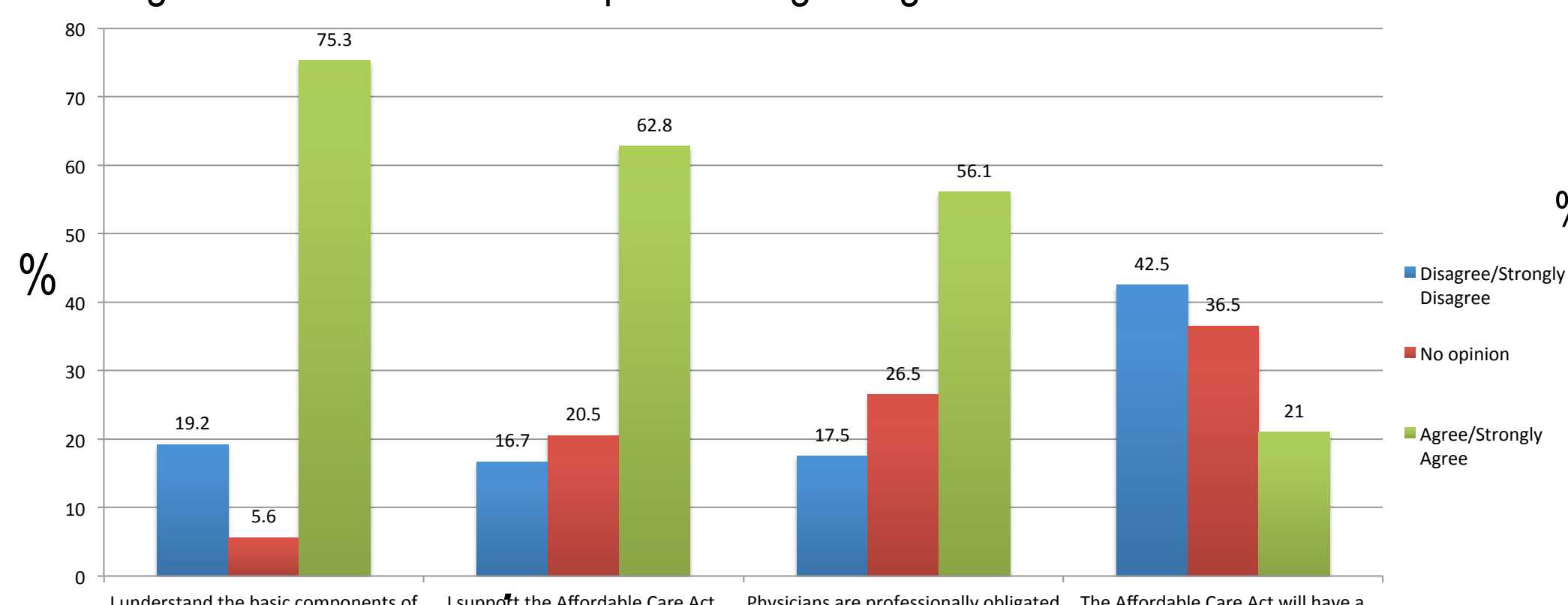


Figure 4. Medical Student Opinion of Six Health Care Policies

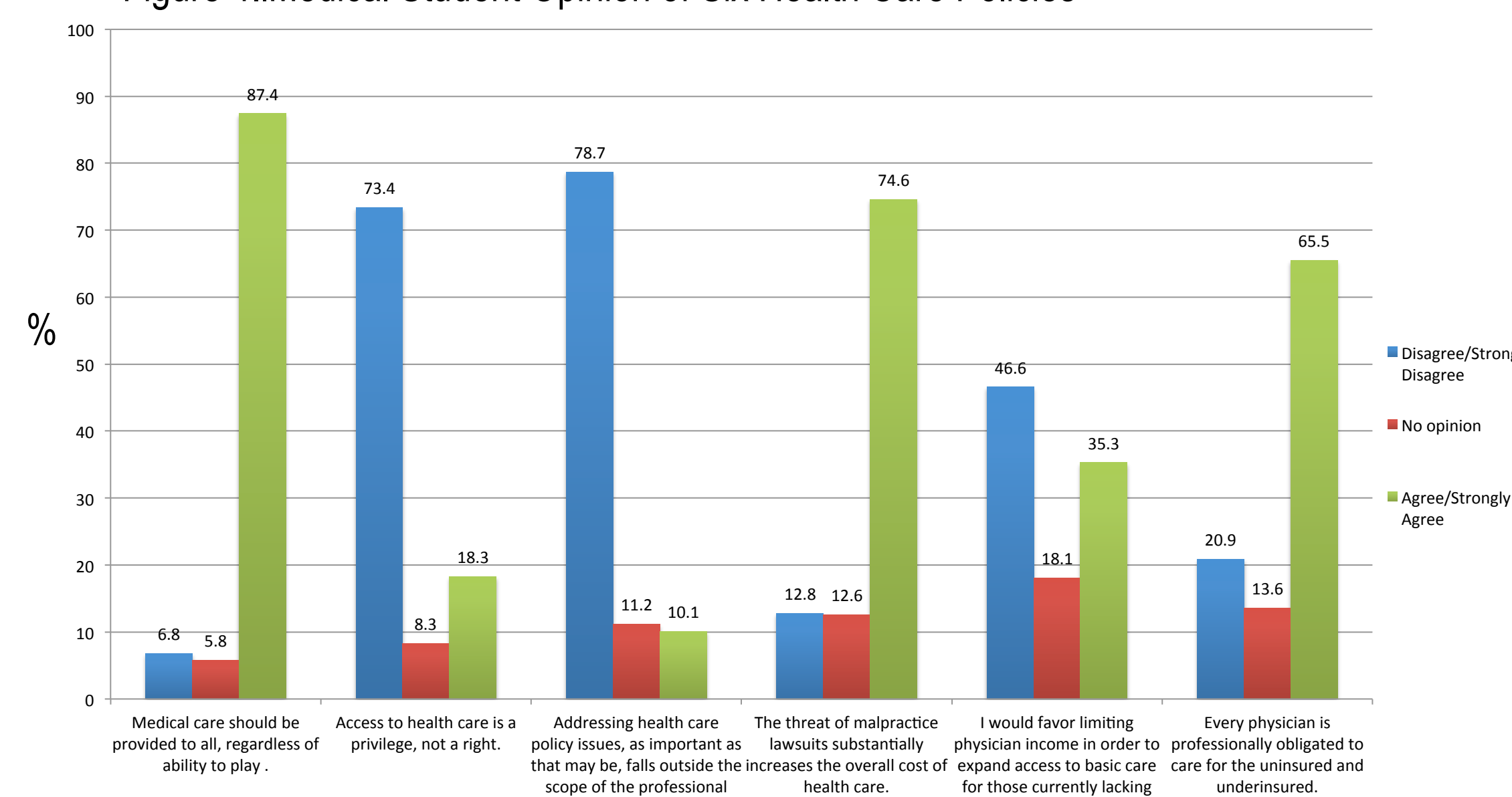


Figure 5. Medical Student Level of Agreement to Seven Statements on Health Care Policies and Hypothetical Situations

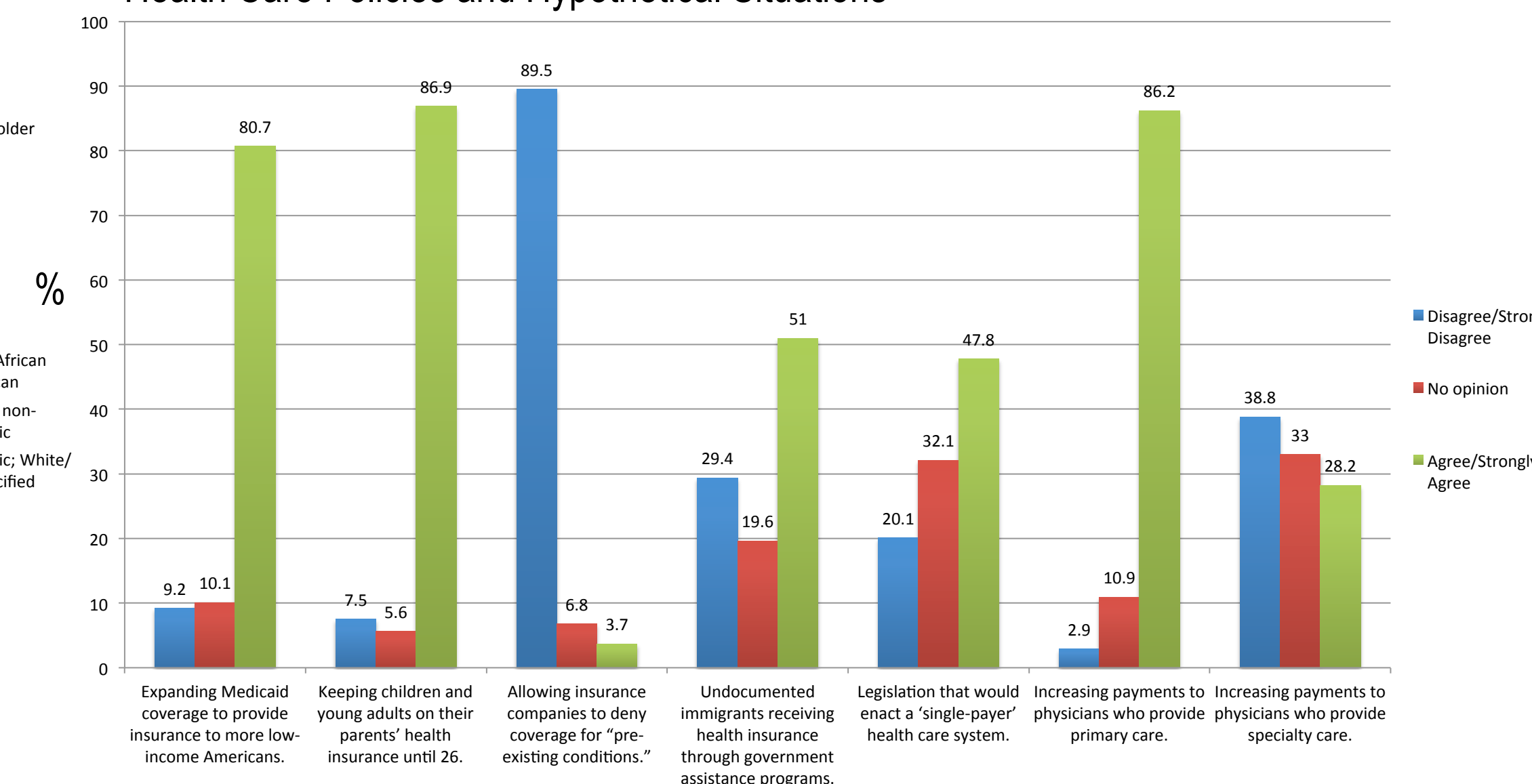
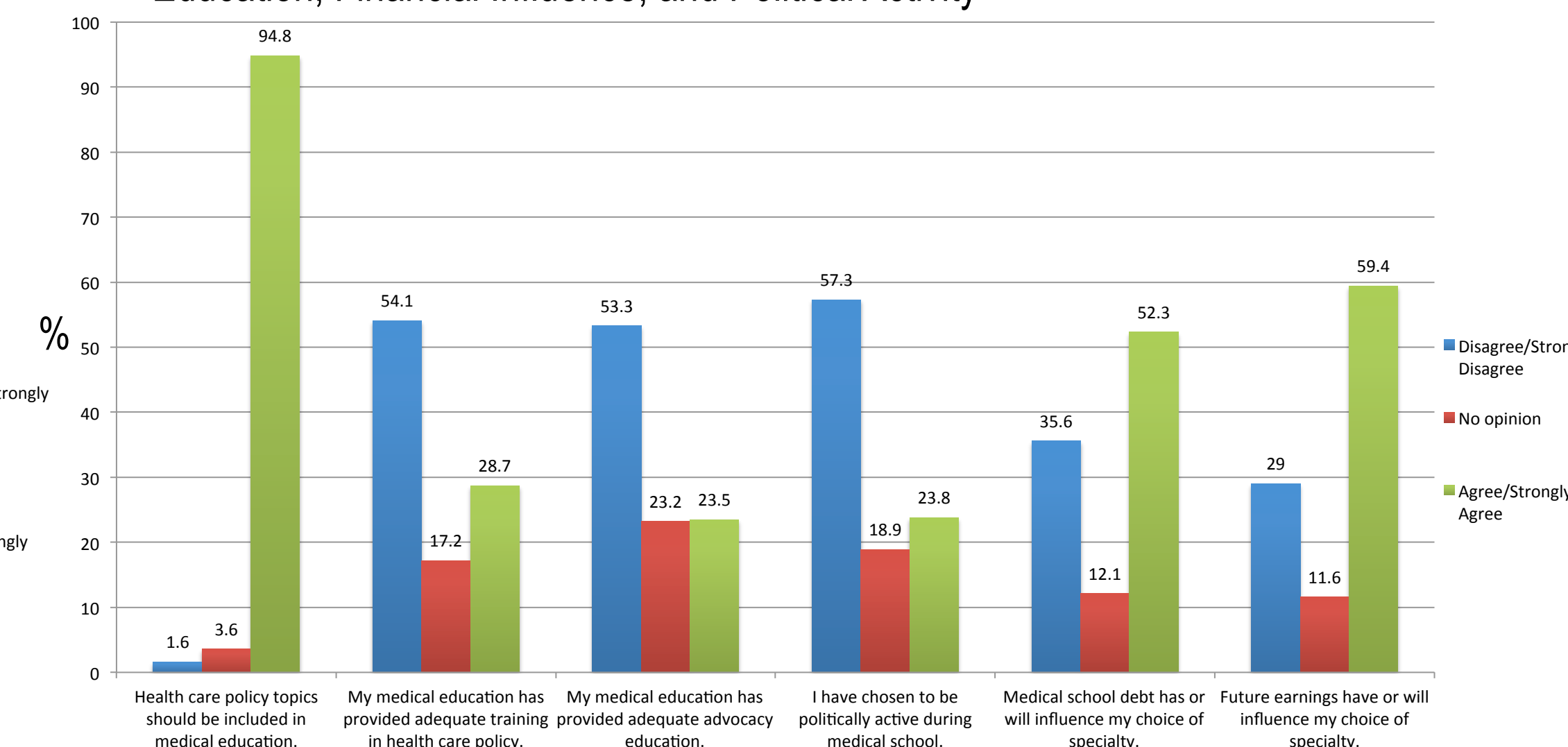


Figure 6. Medical Student Responses to Six Questions on Health Care Policy Education, Financial Influence, and Political Activity



| | Table 2. Multiple Regression Model with Medical Student's Opinion on the Affordable Care Act (ACA)* | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|---|
| | I understand the basic components of the Affordable Care Act. | I support the Affordable Care Act. | Physicians are professionally obligated to assist with implementation of the Affordable Care Act. | The Affordable Care Act will have a negative influence on my future career in medicine. |
| | OR (95% CI) | OR (95% CI) | OR (95% CI) | OR (95% CI) |
| Year in medical school | | | | |
| First year | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Second year | 1.1 (0.8-1.5) | 1.0 (0.7-1.4) | 0.9 (0.7-1.2) | 1.0 (0.7-1.5) |
| Third year | 0.8 (0.6-1.1) | 0.7 (0.5-0.9)*† | 0.8 (0.6-1.0) | 1.2 (0.8-1.7) |
| Fourth year | 0.9 (0.7-1.2) | 0.7 (0.5-0.98)*† | 0.8 (0.6-1.0) | 1.2 (0.8-1.8) |
| PhD/Masters/Other | 2.9 (1.3-6.6)* | 1.0 (0.5-2.1) | 1.1 (0.7-2.0) | 0.8 (0.3-1.8) |
| Anticipated Specialty | | | | |
| Primary care | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Surgery | 0.7 (0.6-0.9)*† | 0.6 (0.4-0.7)** | 0.7 (0.6-0.9)* | 1.9 (1.5-2.6)** |
| Procedural specialty | 0.8 (0.6-1.1) | 0.4 (0.3-0.6)** | 0.7 (0.5-0.97)* | 2.3 (1.6-3.5)** |
| Non-procedural specialty | 0.6 (0.4-0.9)*† | 0.8 (0.5-1.2) | 1.3 (0.8-1.9) | 1.2 (0.7-2.1) |
| Non-clinical specialty | 0.7 (0.3-1.8) | 1.0 (0.4-3.1) | 0.9 (0.4-1.9) | 1.4 (0.4-4.3) |
| Unknown/Other | 0.8 (0.6-1.1) | 0.6 (0.4-0.8)* | 0.7 (0.5-0.9)* | 1.2 (0.9-1.8) |
| Political affiliation | | | | |
| Conservative | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Moderate | 1.2 (0.9-1.7) | 5.7 (4.1-7.9)** | 1.9 (1.4-2.5)** | 0.25 (0.19-0.34)** |
| Liberal | 2.2 (1.7-2.9)** | 35.3 (25.4-48.5)** | 4.7 (3.6-6.0)** | 0.06 (0.04-0.08)** |
| Other | 1.2 (0.9-1.7) | 2.1 (1.3-3.5) | 1.1 (0.7-1.8) | 0.8 (0.5-1.2) |
| Knowledge Score | | | | |
| Mean and below | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Above mean | 2.0 (1.6-2.4)** | 1.7 (1.4-2.1)** | 1.2 (1.02-1.5)* | 0.8 (0.6-1.0) |
| Educational debt | | | | |
| Less than \$100,000 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| \$100,000 - \$200,000 | 0.9 (0.7-1.1) | 0.9 (0.7-1.1) | 0.9 (0.7-1.1) | 1.0 (0.8-1.4) |
| \$200,000 or more | 1.0 (0.7-1.2) | 1.0 (0.8-1.2) | 1.0 (0.8-1.2) | 1.2 (0.9-1.6) |

Discussion and Conclusions

The majority of students supported the ACA and agree they have a professional obligation for its implementation. Most believe they have a good understanding of the basic ACA components, but the average knowledge score was low at 6.8 out of the 9 questions, with the majority of the students answering incorrectly in regards to Medicaid expansion among states and a new government-run insurance plan. The majority of students answered that they felt inadequately educated in health care policy by their institutions. Liberal or moderate students, and those intending to enter primary care, were associated with higher levels of ACA understanding, support, professional obligation, and positive expectations when compared to conservative students and future surgeons. With a large percentage of students supporting reform, especially among students anticipating primary care, there is optimism that future physicians can achieve successful health care reform. Our next step is implementation of a health care policy curriculum into medical schools.

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