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.

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.

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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