Patient gender impacts medical students’ levels of confidence and comfort in performing clinical examination skills. There are variations in how prepared students feel for clinical interactions with patients of different genders.

Medical education must move away from an entrenched androcentric status quo to best serve patients of all genders.

REFERENCES


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BARRIERS TO EQUAL CONFIDENCE/COMFORT

Males as standard

In my very first OSCE... it was CV exam and it was a woman and... they’d never even discussed how to approach it so I just assumed they would just give you a male patient because they just teach them. They didn’t. And I kind of freaked out... Afterwards, I asked my VS tutor what I should have done and she just said “Oh you should just work around it really.”

I don’t think we’ve ever really been given any advice or information on how to examine the chest of a female patient before and we certainly have never practised on a female.

Tutors perpetrating negative attitudes

We never have the opportunity to practice on women in 2D, even when we split into single gender groups the girls don’t do it properly on each other as they don’t want to touch each other’s breasts (in my experience). This means when we split into single gender groups we girls don’t get to practice properly at all. Often find it is the tutors too awkward to ask the girls.

It is always the males that are encouraged to volunteer. I have had VS tutors in the past be a bit awkward about using females.”

Facilitators of equal confidence/comfort

Relating to the patients

As a female I find it a lot easier to examine with another female, however, in case of respiratory and cardiac exam males are easier to examine as we were made to practice on males.

Role as a doctor and a professional

I remind myself I should be as professional as possible so I shouldn’t feel uncomfortable.

Gender blindness

Gender does not matter in an examination.

It’s the same exam regardless of what gender is performed on.

Recommendations for change:

- Opportunities for equal practice on men/women
- Gender-sensitive training for tutors and staff
- Promotion of learning resources featuring all genders.
- Most importantly, talk about and acknowledge the differences and the barriers.