Women’s health, the environment, and health professional activism: a health professional student elective
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Introduction

CNI strives to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions from UC’s buildings and vehicles by 2025. As medical students, we aimed to support the initiative through a healthcare lens.

A 2017 JAMA article addressing physicians’ role in climate change advises, “Start with medical students.”(1) and the CNI cites student engagement as a critical component in the success of the initiative.(2)

UCSF School of Medicine has recently incorporated environmental sustainability into the Health and Society and Inquiry components of the Bridges curriculum, yet student engagement with this topic is still limited. Many students have voiced a desire for a deeper dive into the material and a concrete understanding of how to be agents of environmental change. Chieftly, we believe increased attention should be paid towards a) understanding how climate change unequally affects different populations, and b) what we as students can do to work towards a more sustainable campus, community and future.

To provide the opportunity for increased engagement with these topics, we hosted elective for UCSF 1st and 2nd year health professional students in Fall 2017. The course centered around the intersection between climate change and inequality, particular in relation to women. It has long been acknowledged that environmental hazards disproportionately affect women; the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action prioritized “Women and the environment” as a critical area of concern, (3) and the United Nations WomenWatch Fact Sheet states that “women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men.”(4)

Materials and Methods

We evaluated the impact of our course on student comprehension and engagement both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitative: We delivered pre-and post-course surveys
-21 questions answered on 1-5 Likert scale (Strongly agree, agree, etc.)
-Assessed learning objectives of the course: knowledge, behavior, attitudes

Qualitative: We asked students to reflect on their “take-aways” from the course.

Results and Outcomes

Quantitative: 72 students attended 1+ lecture, and 18 students took the course for credit. Only 5 students completed the survey twice (pre-and post-course). -Analyzed “pre” cohort (n=12) vs. “post” cohort (n=14), recognizing limitations

Qualitative:

Emerged themes were how to:
-Be an informed consumer
 -Counsel patients on environmental hazards
 -Recognize disparities
 -Advocate

“I learned that environmental pollution along with climate change and other unsustainable agricultural practices disproportionately burden women and other marginalized populations.”

Conclusions

In general, we garnered significant student interest in an elective centering on climate change and health, which was our main goal.

-Quantitative data shows that course content made students 1) more aware of the connection between climate and health and 2) inspired to take action in their personal and future professional lives as health care providers
- Qualitative data further reflects these themes and highlight’s the course’s focus on the intersection of three themes for our students:

Future Goals

Future goals include development of this course into other health professional school curriculums,
-Provide mentorship and guidance to future course directors
-Encourage UCSF Schools of Dentistry, Pharmacy, PT, Nursing to include climate-related content in required curriculum
-We learned a significant amount about how to to advertise and recruit for student courses, and will be available to share this knowledge with future student or faculty course directors.

Literature Cited


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