

Exploring Student Preparedness in Providing Care to Hispanic Patients

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Introduction

The rapid growth of Hispanics within the US, particularly Mexicans, suggest that this population deserves special attention by occupational therapists (OTs). As the largest subgroup within Hispanics, Mexicans experience serious disparities related to health, poverty, and access to care. Being culturally prepared is an important objective within the OT practice framework. Absence of cultural preparation may adversely affect the ability to deliver person-centered care, facilitate family participation, and establish trust.

The aim of this study was to assess *cultural preparedness* among OT students pertaining to care of Mexican patients.

Methods

Study Design: A cross-sectional, in-person survey assessing readiness of OT graduate students (n=118) to provide care to Mexican patients in the US. Response rate 98%.

Survey: Questions included items related to background characteristics, Spanish courses taken, rating of language fluency, perceptions of Mexicans, knowledge of Mexican values/beliefs, and confidence in serving Mexicans without an interpreter.

Three variables were chosen to represent *cultural preparedness*— 1) verbal fluency in Spanish 2) familiarity with Mexican values/beliefs, and 3) confidence in one's ability to interact with Mexican patients without an interpreter (Cronbach's alpha=.74).

Analysis: Correlation and multiple regression models were used for testing associations with cultural preparedness. All analyses were conducted with SPSS (Version 23).

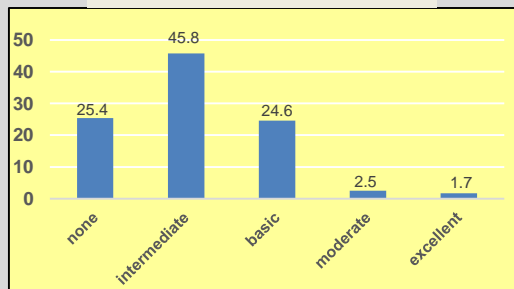


Results

Only a quarter of students (23%) reported having at least one college-level course in Spanish. The top reasons cited for not taking Spanish courses were: not required for my program (67%), conflicts with my required classes (19%), and no aptitude for languages (9%).

Most participants (93%) felt unprepared to interact with Mexicans without an interpreter and only 11% of students felt familiar with Mexican values and beliefs. Self-reported verbal fluency in Spanish was low. Only 5% indicated speaking skills above a basic level (Fig.1).

Fig.1 Levels of Spanish Fluency



Students who felt close to someone of Mexican descent ($p=.01$), taken Spanish courses ($p<.001$), and recognized the serious likelihood of encountering Mexican patients in the future ($p=.003$) demonstrated higher levels of cultural preparedness (Table 1).

Table 1 Covariates associated with cultural preparedness					
	B	SE	β	t	Sig. ^a
College-level Spanish courses	1.906	.373	.400	5.104	<.001
Feel close to a Mexican	.793	.319	.197	2.484	.014
Encounter Hispanics in clinic	.640	.214	.239	2.990	.003

Discussion

Findings indicate a general lack of cultural preparedness of OT students related to Mexican patients, including speaking skills and understanding of Mexican values/beliefs. Few students take college Spanish courses as these are not considered prerequisites for admission nor typically mandated within the curriculum. Close relationships with Mexicans, understanding the growing numbers of Mexicans in US society and language course were associated higher levels of preparedness.

Interactions with individuals from diverse cultures can promote cultural insight and tolerance. Curricular strategies could include integrating simulated Mexican patients, encouragement of study abroad and language courses, exposure to Mexican communities, and helping students recognize the changing ethnic/racial demographics in the US.