

Abdomen and chest examinations in peer physical examination: Variation in participation by gender

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Abstract

Aims: To compare participation in peer physical examination (PPE) for male and female students when learning abdomen and chest examinations; to compare attitudes towards PPE for male and female students; and to determine if self-reported participation as examinees in PPE was related to attitudes towards PPE.

Background: The opportunity to learn physical examination skills through practising with peers in formal tutorials is an important part of many medical curricula.

Method: Students voluntarily completed a self-report questionnaire at the end of their third semester of medical training in which they rated their attitudes towards PPE and indicated how often they had been examined while practising abdomen and chest examinations.

Results: Students volunteered to be examined less frequently in PPE when learning chest examination compared with abdominal examination; female students volunteered less frequently than male students for chest examinations but volunteered with similar frequency for abdomen examinations. Attitudes towards PPE were not related to student gender, but students who never volunteered for abdomen examinations tended to have higher average ratings for the perceived difficulty of PPE and lower ratings for the perceived value of PPE. Most students supplemented PPE with informal practice, although a majority practised exclusively with male volunteers.

Conclusions: There is clear variation in participation rates for learning examinations for PPE of the abdomen and chest, but this variation is only partly explained by student gender and attitudes.

Keywords: peer physical examination, medical students, clinical skills, student attitudes.