

Evaluation of ethics education in obstetrics and gynecology residency programs

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OBJECTIVE: The objective of the study was to assess the current status of ethics education in obstetrics-gynecology residency programs.

STUDY DESIGN: A cross-sectional, web-based survey was designed in conjunction with a professional survey laboratory at the University of Chicago. The survey was piloted with a convenience sample of clinical medical ethics fellows to assess question content and clarity. The survey was deployed by e-mail to all obstetrics-gynecology residency program directors. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze participant responses. The University of Chicago's Institutional Review Board deemed this study exempt from institutional review board formal review.

RESULTS: Of 242 eligible obstetrics-gynecology residency program directors, 118 (49%) completed the survey. Most respondents were from university-based programs (n=147, 66%) that were not religiously affiliated (n=149, 83%) and trained 4-6 residents per postgraduate year (n=146, 70%). Although 50% of program directors (n=146) reported having ethics as part of their core curriculum, most programs teach ethics in an unstructured manner. Fifty-seven percent of respondents (n=146) stated their program dedicated 5 or fewer hours per year to ethics. The majority of program directors (n=148, 73%) responded they would like more to a lot more ethics education and believed that ethics education should be required (n=149, 85%) for residents to complete their training. Respondents identified that crowding in the curriculum was a significant barrier to increased ethics training (n=145, 45%) and two-thirds (n=147, 67%) reported a lack of faculty expertise as a moderate barrier to providing ethics education in the residency curriculum.

CONCLUSION: This study found that a lack of structured curricula, inadequate faculty expertise, and limited time were important barriers for ethics education in obstetrics-gynecology programs across the nation. Despite these existing challenges, program directors have a strong interest in increasing ethics education in residency training. Therefore, additional resources are needed to assist program directors in enhancing resident ethics education.

Key words: ethics education, obstetrics-gynecology residency programs