The mission of A.T. Still University School of Osteopathic Medicine in Arizona (ATSU-SOMA) is to prepare individuals to become compassionate osteopathic physicians and healthcare leaders who serve medically underserved populations with a focus on research and community-oriented primary care. Selection of students, faculty, and staff, as well as curriculum, are geared toward this mission.

ATSU-SOMA is the only US medical school with a distributed, multi-state model that embeds all students in community health centers at the onset of their second year. ATSU-SOMA has a longitudinal curricular emphasis on addressing health disparities.

Healthcare for people experiencing homelessness is a major challenge in our communities. Research suggests medical student attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness change negatively as they progress to graduation. Negative attitudes appear to progress and are more prominent among teachers than learners.

This highlights the potential problem of physician/mentor attitudes affecting student development. Studies have shown improvements in these attitudes among trainees participating in specific education programs with direct care of people experiencing homelessness.

When evaluating osteopathic medical student (OMS) and educator perceptions and attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness, we hypothesized:

- Initial positive student attitudes will carry forward into clinical training.
- Professional practice and positive trends will exist with our campus-based faculty, staff, and core community health center preceptors.
- Osteopathic touch and the use of osteopathic manipulative treatments (OMT) positively impacts student perceptions of patients experiencing homelessness.

Specific research aims included:

- Analyze A.T. Still University (ATSU) – School of Osteopathic Medicine in Arizona (SOMA) student, faculty, and preceptor perceptions and attitudes toward people experiencing homelessness.
- Evaluate the perceived impact of participating in direct osteopathic patient care of people experiencing homelessness on SOMA students.

Survey Averages for Students, Faculty, Preceptors
Averages between class years reveal a consistent level of positive perceptions over time.

Comparison to Literature:
Comparison of averages of ATSU-SOMA students and Canadian medical students. Each percentage indicates level of agreement.

 ATSU-SOMA Faculty 43.9% (43/98)
Clinical Preceptors 19.5% (25/128)

Response Rates
Provided for each survey population by survey period.

The data are consistent with our hypothesis that SOMA’s emphasis on service to the underserved and our unique curricular model may help counter the progression of negative attitudes towards homelessness.

SOMA student attitudes consistently proved positive when compared to what has been observed in prior traditional medical education studies.

The data also underscore the importance of faculty mentoring, not only for the clinicians but also non-physician faculty, suggesting that all mentors can have an impact on our learners’ attitudes and perceptions. We plan to continue to track these attitudes as we follow the class of 2019 and 2020 through graduation.

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