Cultural Sensitivity and Global Health Experiences in Osteopathic Medical Education

Peter Wan, OMS-II, YaQun Zhou, OMS-II, Ka Yuk Wong, OMS-II, Tipsuda Junsanto-Bahri, MD, Christine Lomiguen, MD
Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine – New York, NY

Introduction

Medical students, residents, and physicians are encouraged and often required to continue their medical education to possess up-to-date skills and knowledge to best serve their patients. Changes that occur in medicine, however, are not only guidelines and therapeutics but also patient populations, with an ever-increasing need for improved cultural competency and sensitivity. Clinical experiences abroad are valuable in prompting reflection and discussion regarding cultural values, patient perspectives on traditional medicine, patient impressions of osteopathic manipulative therapy (OMT), available resources, and community education. The importance of these experiences abroad during medical education are highlighted to develop cultural awareness while enhancing osteopathic practices in global medicine.

Nepal

Medical campaigns were led in rural areas, comprised of baseline primary care assessments through patient history taking and physical examinations. Students also provided education on public health practices and basic proper hygiene. Patients were introduced to OMT and received treatment for musculoskeletal, gastrointestinal, and neuropathic disorders. In addition, patients were educated on home osteopathic self-exercises to supplement their recent OMT treatment.

China

First-hand student experiences in cultural traditions included acupuncture, herbal medicine on reproductive health, and musculoskeletal disorders. The similarities and differences between traditional medicine and osteopathic medicine were highlighted as a gateway to introduce OMT. Students’ reflections from personal experience and patient perspectives supplemented their undergraduate osteopathic medical education.

Philippines

Students gained experiences with infectious diseases not prevalent in the United States, such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, dengue fever, tetanus, and rabies. Focus was placed on preventive medicine and community outreach in rural areas. Students also participated in medical campaigns with an emphasis on nutrition, vaccination, exercise and education.

Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine

Techniques used during experience include:

- **Spencer Technique**
  - For restriction and pain of the shoulder
  - e.g., adhesive capsulitis

- **Mesenteric Lift**
  - For gastrointestinal issues
  - e.g., constipation, diarrhea

- **Muscle Energy**
  - For pediatric gait abnormalities, general back pain, innominate in short leg syndrome

- **Lymphatic Pump**
  - For improvement of vascular and lymphatic circulation

- **Counterstrain**
  - For improvement of general pain

Conclusions

Lack of exposure to different global cultures is a challenge often posed to medical students. Through medical mission trips and global health experiences, students are able to gain a first-hand appreciation for the need for appropriate cultural sensitivity. It is important for future physicians to strengthen cultural competency during their undergraduate osteopathic medical education to help develop skills in counseling for health promotion, disease prevention, public health systems, and global health. Osteopathic demonstrations and OMTs performed abroad can help spread awareness of osteopathic medicine. In addition, students should be mindful of any traditional medicine that patients may be receiving, particularly, any contradictive or supportive effects that: traditional modalities may have with Western medicine, including OMT.

References
