

Transgender healthcare in medical education: Improving awareness of the challenges, and opportunities, for undergraduate pharmacy and medical students

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Introduction

The design of a new integrated MPharm programme in 2022 presented the opportunity to introduce a wide range of inclusive, and gender-related healthcare issues, such as transgender healthcare, as part of a new module being offered to third year students called, Men and Women's Health (10 ECTS credits) (now known as Sex, Gender and Health (SGH)). Access to healthcare for transgender patients is fraught with challenges such as lack of knowledge and understanding by healthcare professionals (HCPs), stigma and discrimination, and the absence of, or adherence to, international gender-affirming care guidelines. More recently (2022), Ireland was ranked the worst, out of 27 European countries, in terms of their provision of trans-specific healthcare.

Initiative

The module lead (Department of Chemistry) and the module advisor (Department of Health Psychology) met to discuss the content of the proposed SGH module, building on many topics that were already being taught in the pharmacy programme. The module was specifically designed to comprehensively cover all aspects of how sex and gender impact health outcomes, from normal development of reproductive organs and their functioning, through health promotion, and therapeutic strategies in conditions affecting men and women at various stages of life, from sexual maturity through to contraception, pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause and andropause. Going beyond the traditional consideration of men's and women's health only, all aspects of pharmaceutical care of sexual and gender minority populations and societal considerations such as gender-based violence were also incorporated. The goal of the module is to provide foundational scientific, and clinical knowledge and skills to pharmacy students relevant to supporting patients' gender-related and reproductive health needs throughout the life-course. To support this, new lecture topics were introduced including gender and health, men's health psychology and health promotion, and transgender care (TGC).



I am Human – LGBT+ Inclusion Slogan



Logo for TENI – Transgender Equality Network of Ireland - <https://teni.ie/>

Outcome

The TGC teaching and learning experience has been very well-received by students. This innovation in pharmacy and medical education promotes visibility and awareness, within the student body, of the disadvantages and discrimination experienced by members of this community. It also provides these future healthcare leaders with clear and easily adopted practices to ensure more holistic, inclusive and patient-centred care in the future. Learning was augmented by including a transgender patient case in the simulated patient communications sessions of this module. The inclusion of a guest speaker adds a critical voice to the lived experience of this community.

As part of the RCSI Research Summer School 2024, a project aimed at amplifying and enhancing the current TGC offering in RCSI was conducted, using an inter-professional approach. This proposed half-day workshop will address inequalities in transgender healthcare by increasing core competencies (e.g. communication, teamwork) in pre-graduate healthcare students. The outline of this teaching and learning activity (lesson plan, learning outcomes etc) has been co-designed with students and will be co-delivered with student peer educators complemented by public-patient involvement from TENI. Approaching this learning enhancement in a student-partnership way, as well as the inclusion of key stakeholders (e.g. TENI) ensures the inter-professional teaching activity is distinctly inclusive and collaborative in its design as well as authentic and empowering in its impact. This proposed experiential learning activity has been specifically designed to operationalise and evaluate the impact of an interactive transgender healthcare teaching activity aimed at improving competencies and communication skills using an inter-professional approach incorporating pharmacy, medical and physiotherapy students.

This approach, will generate further and experiential collaboration between students, staff, and external experts and will create a dynamic learning environment. Furthermore, it will facilitate an innovative learning opportunity for multi-disciplinary healthcare students to share discipline specific knowledge while simultaneously gaining important trans-specific (and inclusive) communication skills and professional competencies.

Delivering and evaluating the impact of, transgender healthcare education, with pre-graduate healthcare students is an effective way to create future healthcare leaders who can act as allies and advocates for this disadvantaged patient population.