



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Osteopathic medical students' perception of teaching effectiveness of their primary care clinical preceptors



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## KEYWORDS

Osteopathic medical students;  
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**Abstract** *Background:* Primary care clinical preceptors, including physicians practicing family medicine, general internal medicine and pediatrics, are important members of the osteopathic medical school faculty. They train, teach, and mentor medical students. Their role is crucial in achieving the mission of several osteopathic medical schools – that of preparing primary care physicians to provide quality patient care.

*Objective:* We investigated the perception of effective preceptor teaching by the evaluations of third and fourth year students from one osteopathic medical school. We sought to answer the following questions: 1) Do osteopathic medical students' perception of primary care clinical preceptors' teaching effectiveness differ among family medicine, internal medicine, and pediatrics sub-disciplines?; 2) Is there a difference in osteopathic medical students' perception of teaching effectiveness and perception of the amount of time they spend with their clinical preceptors?

*Methods:* The study participants included third and fourth year medical students that completed the E\*Value Student Evaluation of Preceptor Form of primary care clinical teachers from August 2010 to June 2012 at an osteopathic medical school at a Midwestern university in the United States of America (USA). We performed analysis of variance (ANOVA) to gauge differences among the multiple categorical variables. Differences were considered statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

*Results:* A total of 1303 students completed the evaluations. We found that students' evaluations of all assigned preceptor-related criteria and all unassigned preceptor-related criteria were significant across the three sub-disciplines. This

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suggests that osteopathic medical students perceive the teaching of their primary care clinical preceptors as highly effective. We also found statistically significant differences among the three categories of time spent and the overall perception of teaching effectiveness of each of the preceptor categories.

*Conclusion:* Even though preceptor teaching effectiveness is only one aspect of clinical education, it is important to understand medical students' perception regarding strengths and weaknesses of their clinical training. Perception of preceptor teaching effectiveness by medical students can provide key insights to guide curriculum/instructional design and faculty development programming.

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### Implications for practice

- Clinical preceptors may see the value of understanding students' perceptions of teaching effectiveness and may modify the way they teach.
- Faculty and curriculum developers may see the value of the study's findings in planning, designing, and implementing faculty development programming and curriculum.
- Medical educators may also apply the study's findings to improve institutional assessment tools for clinical teaching effectiveness.

Clinical education and mentoring of students during clerkship constitute integral parts of physician training—preceptors provide such education and mentoring. Preceptors are defined for the purpose of this study as practicing physicians (assigned and unassigned) who work part-time or on a volunteer basis for the medical school and teach and mentor students during clinical rotations. Interns and residents who teach and mentor medical students are included in this definition.

Increasingly, evaluation and assessment of teaching effectiveness of clinical preceptors are essential to understanding the perception of students regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their clinical training. While teaching effectiveness is the focus of this paper, it is instructive to note that it is only one aspect of the medical students' perception of their clinical training. Factors such as the clinical learning environment, patient availability, patient case mix, and opportunity to work with allied health and non-medical health professionals are other important aspects of clinical training. Medical students provide valuable feedback that can be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning during clerkship.<sup>1–5</sup>

Consequently, there is a growing body of literature on evaluating clinical teaching effectiveness using theory-based, valid, and reliable instruments.<sup>1–5</sup> While medical students' perception of clinical teaching effectiveness has been studied quite well on the allopathic side, there is paucity of information on the osteopathic side. One study focused on developing a clinical teaching quality questionnaire for use in a university osteopathic pre-registration teaching program.<sup>6</sup>

Multiple studies have examined medical students' perception of clinical teaching effectiveness. In a couple of these studies, preceptor behavioral characteristics associated with effective teaching as well as clinical environment or site characteristics were the foci of investigation. A study of third-year medical students in primary care rotations (ambulatory internal medicine, family medicine and pediatrics), showed that the students gave highest ranks to preceptor characteristics such as exuding confidence in medical skills, explaining the decision-making process, treating students with respect, and providing a role model.<sup>7</sup> Another study involving third-year medical students and faculty on primary care preceptor and teaching site characteristics showed that preceptor rather than site characteristics made the major difference in primary care educational experiences.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in a study that compared third-year pediatric clerkship students' learning experiences in community pediatricians practice (CPP) with those in a medical center, the students responded more favorably toward private practice offices. Reasons for the private office preference included the one-on-one instruction, close personal relationship, involvement in the care of many patients, and witnessing firsthand the importance of continuity of care in pediatric care.<sup>9</sup> Even a pre-clerkship study of medical students revealed that attributes of effective physician preceptors should be those

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