By 2030, it is projected 1/5 people in the US will be 65 years old and over. There is a lack of geriatric providers and a growing need for providers who have geriatric-specific training.\(^1\)

Student attitudes towards older adults and communication skills benefit from geriatric-specific curriculum/training.\(^{1,2}\)

COAST-IT was developed to address a lack of health professional student’s interactions with geriatric patients and social isolation in older adults.

AIM: To assess the efficacy of COAST-IT on improving student attitudes towards older adults and communication skills with this population.

Older adults were recruited from various community facilities and were randomly paired with students. Students (NP, MD, PharmD, DDS) made social phone calls once every 1-2 weeks to their older adult partners (OAP).

Program started in the summer of 2021 with NP and pharmacy students and has expanded to the medical and dental school.

Students were surveyed before and after participating in the COAST-IT program every semester.

The survey included perceptional questions and free text responses to assess knowledge, communication, and attitudes towards older adults.

A chi-square test was utilized to evaluate for statistical significance between aggregate pre- and post- response.

Results

Pre
Post

Not really confident: 35.05
Some confidence: 29.03
I believe I can do this: 59.78
I am fairly confident: 12.37
I am very confident: 5.63

375 students have participated and responded to the survey.
Stress while talking to an older adult person was reduced (18.4% to 10.67%).
Better able to define ageism (74.1% to 80.3% of students picking correct answer).

Progress to Date and Future Directions

Expected results
- The next round of data collection is set for June 2022.
- We are expecting to collect data from students of different health profession programs such as RN, NP, DDS, and MD.
- Progressing to a standardized, validated survey
- The initial survey was primarily used for internal program evaluation.
- As of January 2022, COAST-IT is progressing to the use of the COCOA-24 Item scale to comprehensively evaluate impact on ageism.
- Future directions: Expanding to evaluation of impact on the OAP

Conclusions

Caring for the growing older adult population will require interprofessional teams with well-developed communication skills.
Many geriatric-focused curriculum interventions are not longitudinal programs.
The COAST-IT program provides students a way to practice building longitudinal relationships that foster empathy and improved attitudes towards older adults as well as practicing communication skills with real patients early in their training.

Disclosures

None

References