

Department of Research Abstracts

MEDICO-LEGAL EDUCATION OF PEDIATRIC RESIDENTS: ARE WE DOING ANY BETTER?

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Background: A previous survey of graduating pediatric residents revealed significant deficiencies in key areas of medico-legal education despite the mandate by the Residency Review Committee that this be included as part of “professionalism” in training curricula. The importance of medico-legal training during residency is underscored by the fact that 10% of residents are sued for care they provided during residency.

Objective: To ascertain whether there have been any significant changes in medico-legal instruction during pediatric residency training since 2005.

Design/Methods: Annual survey forms were mailed up to four times to a national random sample of categorical PL-3 trainees at the end of the academic years in both 2004 and 2005 (Period 1) and 2007 (Period 2) to ascertain whether they had received instruction in various aspects of Medico-Legal Pediatrics. The results from the two periods were compared. A total of 2,000 residents were contacted (500 each in 2004 and 2005 and 1,000 in 2007).

Results: Responses were received from 582 residents in 2004 and 2005 (58%) and 635 in 2007 (64%). There was a statistically significant improvement in only a single measure, risk communication, which increased from 70% to 75% ($p=0.033$). There were no statistically significant changes in the other eight measured areas of medico-legal education between the two time periods. A large majority of the respondents in both periods reported instruction in medical record documentation (92% vs. 93%), and informed consent and minors (92% v. 93%). Far fewer residents received training in expert witness testimony (25% vs. 29%), vaccine injury liability (28% vs. 31%), or the malpractice crisis (34% vs. 31%). Intermediate responses included instruction on risk management/loss prevention strategies (53% vs. 58%), medical liability insurance (47% vs. 52%), and medical malpractice litigation (45% vs. 49%). In addition, only a small minority (21% vs. 19%) reported that the malpractice crisis had influenced a career decision.

Conclusions: Residents nearing the end of their pediatric training continue to have very limited familiarity with several key medico-legal issues, especially expert witness testimony and vaccine injury liability. Pediatric program directors must find ways to develop novel methods of introducing medico-legal issues during residency training.

