**FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER:**

**MEDICAL STUDENTS’ KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS**

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**Objectives:** Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a diagnostic term used to describe a range of effects that result from prenatal alcohol exposure. FASD can often go undetected or diagnosis may be delayed, as the diagnostic process is complex and consists of physical, behavioural, and cognitive assessments. Due to recent Canadian guideline changes regarding the diagnostic criteria of FASD published in 2016, the medical field is currently in a state of transition between the two sets of guidelines, therefore adding to the complexity of the diagnosis. Delayed or misdiagnosis posed risks for the child’s treatment and prognosis, as research identified that children diagnosed with FASD at an earlier age are better able to overcome their disabilities and adverse life experiences. Healthcare professionals have reported feeling uncomfortable and unprepared regarding the diagnostic process for individuals with FASD. As the majority of healthcare professionals educate themselves about FASD via medical school, residency, or fellowships, the lack of knowledge and competency of these individual may be related to the medical school curriculum itself. Limited research regarding knowledge of FASD by health care professionals in Northern Ontario has been conducted; therefore, the current study seeks to understand what students at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) know about FASD.

**Method:** The proposed research question will be investigated via a two phase, descriptive exploratory study. The first phase consists of two questionnaires: an adapted version of the Healthcare Student Questionnaire, which consists of demographic information and general knowledge regarding various disabilities, as well as the FASD Survey for Healthcare Students, which addresses competency, prevention, and diagnosis of FASD specifically. Students will also be invited to complete the second phase of the study, which consists of a ten question semi-structured interview regarding advice on alcohol consumption to women of childbearing age, perceived ability to care for individuals with FASD, and knowledge of the new Canadian guidelines of FASD diagnosis. Participants include NOSM students in two cohorts—2015 and 2017.

**Results:** Data collection is ongoing; therefore there are no results to present at this time, however preliminary results will be available come April. Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the questionnaires, while the semi-structured interview responses will be analyzed using thematic analysis, providing context to the analysis of the questionnaires. The main objective of the study is to comprehend what NOSM students know about FASD, specifically with respect to knowledge of the diagnostic process, accuracy of advice to women of childbearing age, and differences between the 2015 and 2017 cohorts in regards to the updated Canadian guidelines. According to previous research it is hypothesized that there will be inconsistencies in responses regarding advice to women regarding alcohol consumption, as well as confusion of terminology and diagnostic criterion because of the 2016 Canadian guideline changes.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** The researcher will identify the potential gaps between medical school curriculum and knowledge surrounding FASD diagnosis, prevention, and treatment. These results will help inform future curriculum changes at NOSM, as well as provide a comprehensive look at future healthcare professionals’ advice to women of childbearing age regarding alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

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