**EXAMINING ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF NORTHERN ONTARIO SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STUDENTS ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

**Alicia Mendes & Shelley L. Watson, PhD**

**Laurentian University**

**Objectives:** In Canada, the diagnosis of ASD is on the rise and currently affects 1 in 68 children, with a ratio of 4:1 comparing diagnosis between boys and girls respectively (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). The current literature surrounding the knowledge of ASD in medical professionals is limited within Canada, as research is being conducted internationally. Of the research completed, studies examining licensed medical professionals is scarce as the majority of information gathered comes from student populations. Concerns have been raised regarding the knowledge of ASD among health care students (Bakare et al., 2015) as well as their attitudes towards individuals diagnosed with ASD (Simonstein & Mashiach-Eizenberg, 2014). The current study examines the following research questions:

* What level of knowledge do Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) students have on ASD?
* What are the attitudes of NOSM students toward individuals diagnosed with ASD?

**Method**: The current study is a mixed-methods design, using quantitative data from the Health Care Questionnaire, and qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews. Participants will consist of be third and fourth year medical students studying at NOSM at the Sudbury campus. It is expected that 25 students will participate in the study.

Phase one includes the distribution of The Health Care Student Questionnaire, which is designed to assess medical students’ knowledge on intellectual and developmental disabilities (Isaacs, Minnes, Burbidge, Loh, & Versnel, 2012; Minnes, Isaacs, Burbidge, Loh, & Versnel, 2012). Participants will also be asked to participate in phase two, which involves a 14 question semi-structured interview that examine medical students’ knowledge of ASD and their attitudes toward individuals diagnosed with ASD.

**Results:** Data collection is still ongoing, therefore there are no results at this time. Based on previous literature, it is expected that results will reveal a satisfactory level of knowledge on ASD. Additionally, it is expected that students will have a more thorough understanding of the diagnosis of ASD, rather than the treatment. In terms of attitudes, the literature reveals that medical students who participate in a clinical setting with individuals diagnosed with ASD are more likely to have positive attitudes toward the individuals than students who do not have a clinical placement.

**Discussion:** The current study aims to understand the concerns of healthcare students to create improved support and resources for individuals with ASD, their parents and families, as well as the healthcare providers. By identifying gaps in the knowledge of NOSM students, we will be able to determine if changes need to be made to medical school curriculum, plus provide further professional development opportunities.

**Correspondence:**

Alicia Mendes, Laurentian University, amendes@laurentian.ca