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Gender Identity and Pronoun Usage in Standardized Patient Encounters

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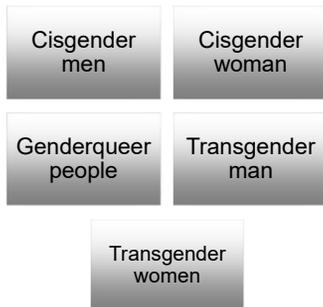
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Introduction

- SOAP (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan) notes are the standardized document clinicians use to record evaluations of a patient.
- These notes can provide insight into clinicians' pronoun usage and consistency when interacting with non-cisgender patients.
 - Accurate, consistent pronoun usage is important as it is a primary way of affirming the patient's gender identity, especially since non-cisgender patients experience significant health disparities linked to medical mistrust.¹

Methods

- A sample of SOAP notes (n=286) was taken from two sessions of standardized patient encounters at the University of Louisville School of Medicine in 2017 (n=137) and 2018 (n=149).
- There were five case iterations of the standardized patient based on gender identity:



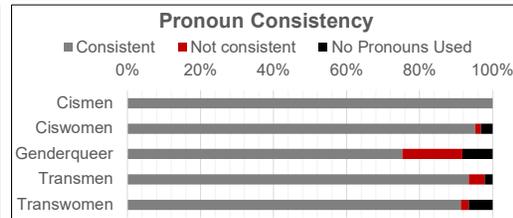
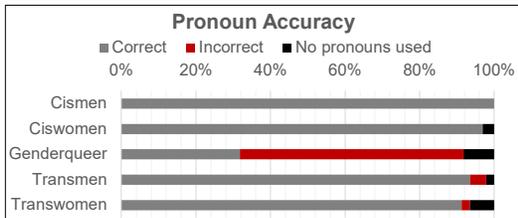
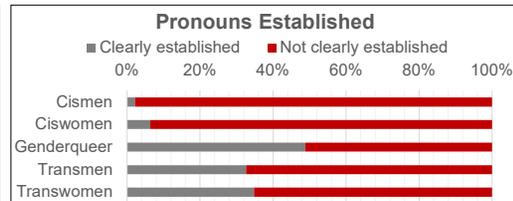
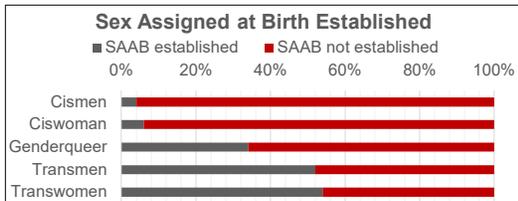
- Each note was coded for themes related to sex assigned at birth as well as pronoun establishment, accuracy, and consistency.

Results

Case Iterations	
Cisgender men	N=45
Cisgender women	N=63
Genderqueer people	N=85
Transgender men	N=46
Transgender women	N=46

Disregard for Established Pronouns

Over the two years of the project, students disregarded established pronouns in their written documentation 16 times for genderqueer patients and 1 time for a transman patient.



Representative Examples of Practice Clinical Documentation (SOAP Notes)

Accurate Use of Established Pronouns

"Taylor Nichols, a 32 year old trans-female (male to female transition, **She/Her/Hers**), with a history of asthma presented to the clinic to establish as a new patient. **She** reports that 6-8 weeks ago she stepped on a nail and visited an urgent care clinic where **she** was treated and given a tetanus shot. **She** has no pain or irritation at the site of the wound and says it is all healed, but they recommended **her** following up with a primary care physician..."

Disregard for Established Pronouns

"The patient is Taylor Nichols, a 32 year old phenotypic woman who identifies as gender queer, **prefers they/them pronouns** and presents today as a new patient.... Taylor is presenting now because **she** has secured a new job and now has insurance... Taylor has a long gap in care, so getting **her** current with vaccinations should be done imminently. Taylor expressed an interest in having **her** Pap smear performed to check for cervical cancer... Taylor is gender queer and has been taking testosterone supplements that **she** has been receiving off of the internet..."

Establishing Sex Assigned at Birth

"Mr. Taylor Nichols is a new patient in the office today. Taylor is 32 yo and is looking for a new primary care physician after graduating from college. Taylor has no current health issues or concerns but suffers from subacute asthma that rarely bothers him since he was young. He has been taking testosterone patches for 2 years and is supplied by the internet in order to **transition from female (assigned at birth) to male**. He does not complain of any unwanted side effects."

Discussion

- These notes demonstrate a lack of rigor in accurately recording pronouns and consistently using the correct pronouns for non-cisgender patients.
- In this study, the pronouns of genderqueer patients were most often disregarded and inconsistently used, pointing to a continued lack of understanding/acknowledgment of non-binary identities.²
- The stark difference in the documentation of SAAB between cisgender and non-cisgender patients displays a clear cisnormative bias on the part of the students.
- Not establishing SAAB for non-cisgender patients can lead to incorrect assumptions by the care team, leading to ineffective and potentially harmful recommendations.
- Based on these findings, we conclude that there exists a need for more education and practice with using and documenting gender-neutral pronouns among medical students.
- Students can also benefit greatly from interacting with non-cisgender patients as a part of the medical school curriculum.³

Future Study

These findings open the doors for further analysis of pronoun usage in terms of code co-occurrence, common vocabulary, and pronoun usage in relation to other non-cisgender specific documentation needs. These include the documentation of sex assigned at birth and trans-specific healthcare needs.

Acknowledgements

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