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A Case Study of Online Peer-Learning to Foster Cultural Awareness among Medical Students

Given that 40% of New Zealand's population is expected to be non native born by 2025 and that most migration will come from non-Western countries, there is a growing recognition that medical graduates need to develop cultural literacy to work effectively with diverse clients. This paper will explore an initiative to revise the curriculum for a Culture & Health unit at the University of Otago, including piloting the use of online discussion forums to foster student engagement with the complex issues related cross-cultural clinical encounters (i.e. language differences, family dynamics, and underlying value differences, etc.). The diversity within the medical student cohort provided a rich milieu for the development of intercultural skills. This research combined the strengths of online discussion to foster collaborative, peer learning with a diverse student cohort to help inform the discussions about culture and healthcare.

The purpose of the research was to discover if a collaborative, asynchronous online discussion among a diverse group of medical students would foster critical reflection about culture and healthcare. In short, would these students be able to apply Hofstede's dimensions of culture in a clinical setting, identify their own cultural beliefs and values, and as a result of the interaction among culturally diverse peers alter their perspectives or assumptions. Mezirow's theory of transformative learning in adulthood was used to interrogate the data. This presentation will describe initial findings and explore the limitations of the study.