

Development of “Gender Medicine” Module at the University of Lucerne

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Introduction

Gender-specific medicine has gained significant importance in both human medicine and social sciences in recent years. The biopsychosocial model of medicine, which underpins current medical curricula, necessitates a new approach to gender-specific issues in medicine. Furthermore, gender medicine is relevant as an example of personalized medicine.

In the newly established degree programs, Joint Master in Human Medicine (JMM UZH UniLu) and the Bachelor in Health Sciences (UniLu), gender medicine was not part of the curriculum until 2022, as is the case in almost all Swiss universities. Since both programs are still in the development phase, there was great interest to include gender medicine in these programs. An elective module was developed for both study programs.

The main purpose of the project was to introduce students of human medicine and health sciences to the fundamentals of gender medicine by developing, implementing, and evaluating a "Gender Medicine" module for these students.

Results

Development and Implementation

Both modules were introduced and implemented according to the module plan. The number of participants was 20 in the Master's program in Medicine and 20 in the Bachelor of Health Sciences program. Interest in the two modules was at least as high as in the alternative elective modules offered at the same time.

Teaching Content

Due to the differences in the study programs and the varying number of available teaching units, the curricula differ from each other:

Bachelor of Science Health Sciences	Master of Medizin
Definitions of gender and gender medicine	Concept of Gender Medicine & Gender in Society
Roles, attitudes and culture from a gender lens	Case vignettes
Gender in language and communication in healthcare settings	Gender Medicine in cardiology
History and philosophy: gender and change	Domestic violence
Drug Development, study design, epigenetic and individualised medicine	Transgender individuals
Gender inequities in socioeconomic risk factors	Gender at the workplace
Caregiving	Diseases from a gender perspective
Prevention – Diagnostics – Therapy in somatic	Pharmacology and studies
Prevention – Diagnostics – Therapy in somatic	Case vignettes
Prevention – Diagnostics – Therapy in non-somatic	In the Master's program in Medicine, patient simulations were also used for the case vignettes.
Prevention – Diagnostics – Therapy in non-somatic	
Gender at the workplace in healthcare settings	
Actions WHO-Sustainable Development Goals	

Evaluation

Medical students were asked, among other things, about the usefulness of the module for their future medical practice. The average response was 4.6 with a standard deviation of 1. The main criticisms were the insufficient number of hours and the limited number of clinical examples.

The Health Sciences students were asked, among other things, about the relevance of the module for their overall studies and they gave an average rating of 5 with a standard deviation of 1.1.

Master's Thesis Evaluation

Students in the Gender Medicine module reported, compared to the control group, increased confidence with the topic of gender and a greater willingness to consider the topic in their professional practice. After attending the module, they demonstrated a higher sensitivity to gender issues and a greater openness to diversity.

Method

Curriculum Development

To comprehensively cover the field of "Gender Medicine" from both medical and social science perspectives, an analysis of existing offers in international study programs was conducted. Based on this analysis, the subject areas were defined and distributed across the available teaching hours. In the Master of Medicine program, 18 teaching units of 45 minutes each were planned, while in the Bachelor of Health Sciences program, 26 teaching units were allocated. The Master of Medicine program was designed in German, while the Bachelor of Health Sciences was taught in English. Both modules are offered once a year.

Evaluation

The Gender Medicine module in the Master of Medicine program was first offered in 2022, while the module in the Bachelor of Health Sciences program was launched in 2023. Both modules were evaluated in detail by the Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine at the University of Lucerne.

The first implementation of the module in the Master of Medicine program was also examined as part of a Master's thesis. The study explored the extent to which the "Gender Medicine" module influences the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the topic of "Gender" in medicine. A comparison group consisted of students who would have selected the "Health Sciences" module during the same period. program

Discussion

Gender Medicine is not a medical specialty as yet but is actually inherent in all medical specialties. It is also a relevant field of research from both social science and medical perspectives. Gender Medicine reflects the biopsychosocial model of medicine, which currently forms the basis for most curricula in medical education. Additionally, gender-specific medicine is a step towards more individualized medicine.

The development of the two modules described here aimed to provide students with the fundamentals of Gender Medicine in both social and somatic and non-somatic contexts. Furthermore, students are expected to learn to recognize and question their own biases regarding gender diversity. For medical students, the modules also aimed to impart disease-specific knowledge from a gender perspective.

Both modules have been well received by students. This is reflected in high enrollment numbers, and evaluations showing good satisfaction with the perceived individual benefit. The evaluation comparing before and after the module also indicates a change in attitude towards a more nuanced view of diversity and gender specificity.

The module in the Master of Medicine program still shows weaknesses in conveying clinical gender-specific knowledge. Therefore, starting in 2025, this module will be expanded with additional teaching units, primarily to cover gender-specific aspects of various diseases. Additionally, the module will be moved from Year 6 to Year 4 to familiarize students with the topic at an earlier stage in their studies.

Conclusion

Within one year, two modules for Gender Medicine were developed, implemented, and evaluated. Both modules are in high demand among students of Medicine and Health Sciences and are rated positively. The students highly value the benefits of the instruction for their future careers, their studies, and their personal attitudes.

Both modules are to be integrated into the faculty's curriculum, with the module in the Medicine program being expanded.

References:

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