Women in Physiology: Development of educational infographics to improve awareness of the contributions of historical female physiologists.

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Background

- The history of our subject may often receive limited coverage in our curricula, and perhaps only included by a few enthusiastic teaching staff. Some staff and students felt it was sometimes hard to find interesting ways to communicate this information.

- We do cover history of medical sciences in our students’ first ever course, but staff were concerned about how few female scientists appeared within the course material, and that we perhaps had too much of a focus on the UK and Europe.

- Anecdotally, our students’ (and staff!) seemed to have real problems naming an important female physiologist when asked.

- We wanted to find out more about our students’ knowledge and perceptions of women in physiology.

Aims

- To investigate the perceptions of students and academic staff regarding key historical female researchers in physiology.

- It was hoped that this study would raise the profile of women in medical science, and help students learn about the history of physiology.

- To stage an exhibit of infographic posters in the Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS) and investigate if communicating information in this way was viewed positively by the audience.

Methods

Examples of student-created infographic resources

- Infographics (information graphics) are now commonly used by various industries (i.e. marketing, news media, healthcare) to communicate complex information to a broad audience in a quick, memorable and accessible way.

- This project used 11 large infographic posters to stage an exhibit in a public area of a university building.

Discussion & Conclusions

- This pilot study has shown that universities may have to do more to raise the profile of the contributions of female medical scientists in their teaching.

- Exhibits such as this may be an effective method of engaging a broad audience of students and staff with such topics, as well as improving how we teach the history of physiology.

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Results

- 100% agreed infographics were an effective way of representing these women and their contributions, and for engaging a broad audience with scientific concepts/information.

- 100% thought women were treated unfairly in coverage of the history of medical science.

- 92% of respondents agreed they knew more about male researchers in medical sciences.

- 95% agreed that infographic posters were an effective way to learn about the history of physiology.

- 89% felt that university courses focused more on the contributions/discoveries of one gender than another (male or female).

- 97% felt teachers should give equal attention to the contribution of males and females in the subject matter they teach.

- 97% wanted to learn more about women in physiology and 100% wanted more of such exhibitions around university locations.

‘What is a physiologist?’

- Some felt it hard to define as the science crossed traditional disciplinary boundaries.

37 responses in 2 weeks

- Only 24% of respondents had heard of the women physiologists.

- 66% said this knowledge had come from lectures.

Terms used to describe female physiologists in the feedback forms – powerful appeared in 20/37 responses

Thanks & Acknowledgements

- Prof Tilli Tansey & Dr David Miller from History & Archives, Phys Soc.

- Dr Ann Rajnicek for tracking down her copy of ‘Women Physiologists’ that she was sent to review in 1993.

- Rebecca Mackay, who did all the work.