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A new data equity course for health professionals

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Keywords

Praxis, social justice, reflection, core competency assessment

Abstract

Background

Data equity refers to the consideration, through an equity lens, of the ways in which data are collected, analyzed, interpreted, and distributed. It captures a complex set of ideas and underscores marginalized communities' unequal opportunities to access data and, at times, their harm from data's misuse. Data equity considers the ways that data can reinforce stereotypes, exacerbate problems like racial bias, or otherwise undermine social justice. It is important to recognize that data are not neutral, and an intentional focus on thinking critically about the creation and use of data is essential.

Innovation/goal

Data equity is a practice needed for all health researchers and practitioners. Teaching data equity considerations to students is a critical component for an inclusive curriculum in School of Public Health (SPH). The goal of this project is to develop a new data equity course for health professionals.

Methods

A group of multidisciplinary instructors from Biostatistics, Epidemiology and Informatics worked together and developed the new course "Data equity for health professionals". The course was offered for the first time during Fall, 2023 with students coming from the Biostatistics programs and the MPH in Epidemiology program.

Impact/effectiveness

This course will meet the needs of School of Public Health students from Biostatistics, Epidemiology, and other disciplines, and aim to attract students from all over OHSU, who are interested in applying data equity principles in health research. The course is going through OHSU approval as an UNI course, and potentially will be offered as an Interprofessional Education course.

Findings/Results

This new course is an introductory course on complex topics related to data equity, which guide one to conduct health research with inclusivity, equity and justice in mind. Topics of the course included the concepts of data equity and data justice; eugenics in statistical history; and data equity framework in health research including study design, data collection, visualization, analysis and interpretation, communication and dissemination. Other topics include biases and impacts of using social variables in clinical algorithms and prediction models, and potential approaches to address the biases.

This is a two credit course with weekly lectures and active discussions among students. Students provided reflections on topics covered in each lecture as their weekly assignment. In their final project, students picked one published research study and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses in equity considerations in each of the seven stages of the data equity framework, and developed recommendations to improve data equity.

Data equity is a dynamic area that is rapidly evolving. Current topics may be adjusted and additional topics may be added to incorporate new ideas and advances as appropriate.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

The whole class teaches the principles of data equity and their applications in different types of health research studies. Inclusions of diverse study populations are major considerations of designing health research studies, and a topic that students were engaged in insightful discussions during class.

Possible applications

The data equity framework covered in the course provided a way for students to think about equity issues throughout the whole research process from funding to results disseminations. Students will be able to apply the data equity concepts and considerations in practice when they work on a new research study.

By the end of this session, the audience will be able to learn about 1) the basic ideas of data equity and the data equity framework; 2) the data equity course; 3) whether they could benefit from this new course. This session also aims to promote more thinking of and commitment to equity, fairness, and access.