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Pre-graduate medical training on breastfeeding in Portuguese medical schools

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Background & Aim: Breastfeeding has important implications on public health. However, a lack of medical preparation in this area was found, which may have been contributing to the high early breastfeeding discontinuation rate in Portugal. The aim of this study was to analyze the knowledge about breastfeeding of the last year Medicine students of the Portuguese universities.

Method: Observational and descriptive study, based on the application of an online questionnaire about breastfeeding to the Portuguese sixth year Medicine students, of the academic year 2012/2013. A quantitative descriptive analysis of the variables included in the questionnaire was performed, as well as a bivariate analysis to test possible associations between these.

Results: of the total of 261 students tested, 75,1% considered the topic of breastfeeding very important. However, 80,5% revealed feeling insufficiently or only reasonably prepared to assist women who breastfeed. Information about breastfeeding was transmitted essentially in the form of oral communications, and 67% of the students did not contact more than twice with the theme in clinical practice. The average grade for the global knowledge assessment was 42,4%, with 74,3% of the students having a grade lower than 50%. Active learning methods are associated with better performance in terms of knowledge.

Conclusions: Skills and competencies related to breastfeeding are an important but neglected aspect in medical pre-graduate training. Knowledge deficits presented in this study reveal the poor preparation of most finalists in providing assistance to women who breastfeed. As such, this study can be a starting point for the incorporation of appropriate breastfeeding curriculum in the Medicine Courses as well as in the specific training of Family Medicine, Pediatrics and Obstetrics/Gynecology internships.