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Patient Perception of the Semantics of Medical Students Am I a “Medical Student” or a “Student Doctor”

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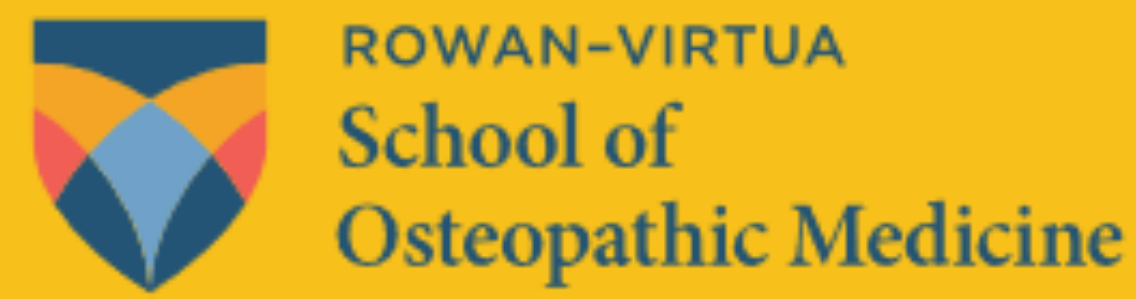
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Patient Perception of the Semantics of Medical Students:

Am I a “Medical Student” or a “Student Doctor”?

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Introduction and Hypothesis

- Patients may perceive medical students differently depending on one of two titles traditionally used in clinical settings: “medical student” or “student doctor.”
- Patient understanding of the medical hierarchy is poor.¹ Misunderstanding the role of providers has been found to adversely affect satisfaction and comfort.^{2,3}
- This study investigates differences in patient perceptions of the terms “medical student” and “student doctor” in university-affiliated and private family practices. Awareness can help guide clinical behaviors of medical students.
- It is hypothesized that patients of a university-affiliated family practice will have a greater understanding of a student’s level of training and stronger preferences due to increased exposure to students.

Methods

- A cross-sectional IRB-approved survey was administered to 259 patients from five osteopathic family practices between May 2022 to June 2022.
- Questions of the survey assessed patient perception of the clinical experience of students, preference regarding the titles of “medical student” and “student doctor,” and perception of students in the outpatient and hospital settings.
- The data was analyzed with standard summary statistics and Chi-square analysis using SPSS.

Results

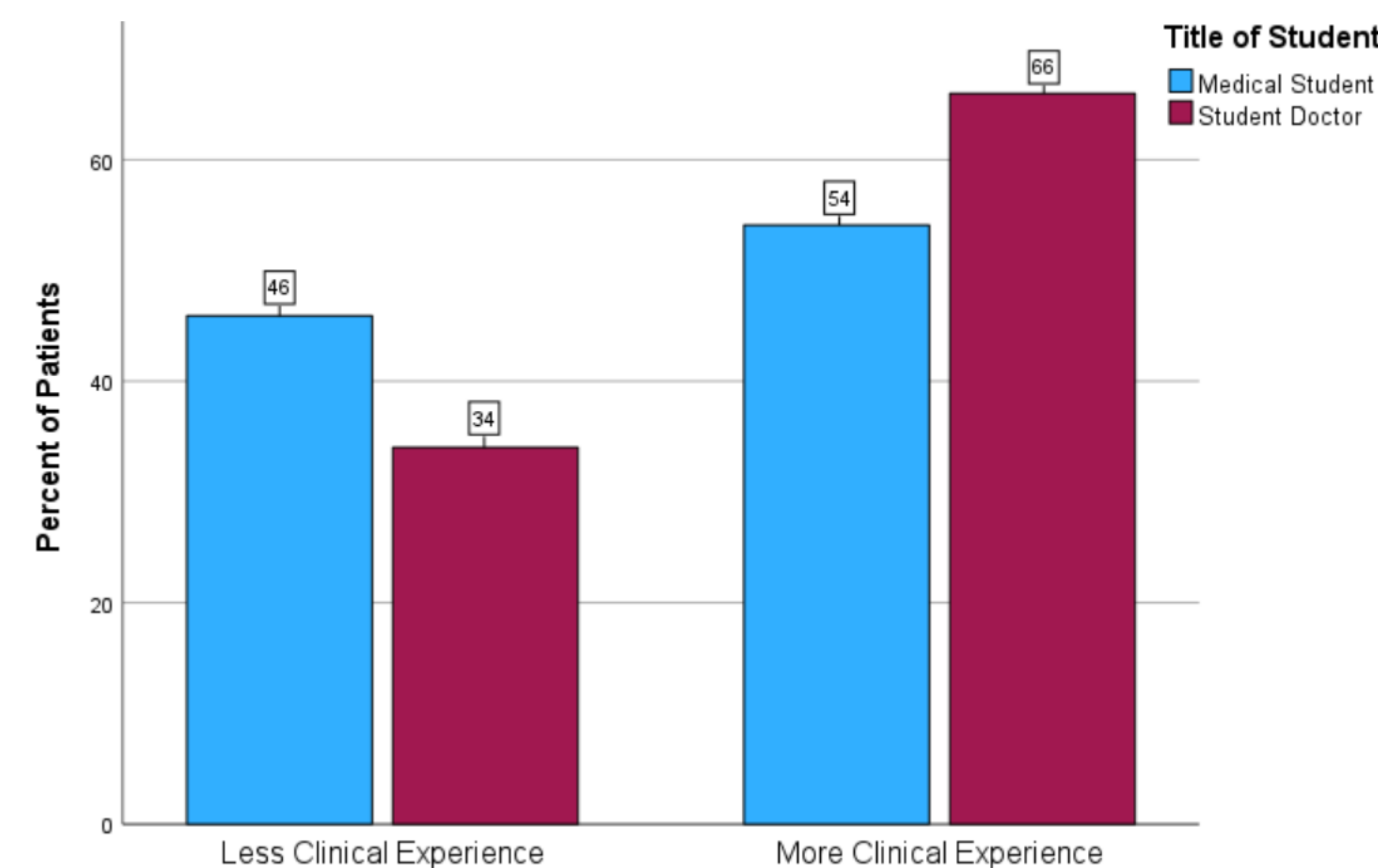


Figure 1. A bar graph depicting patient perception of the levels of clinical experience associated with the titles, “medical student” and “student doctor.”

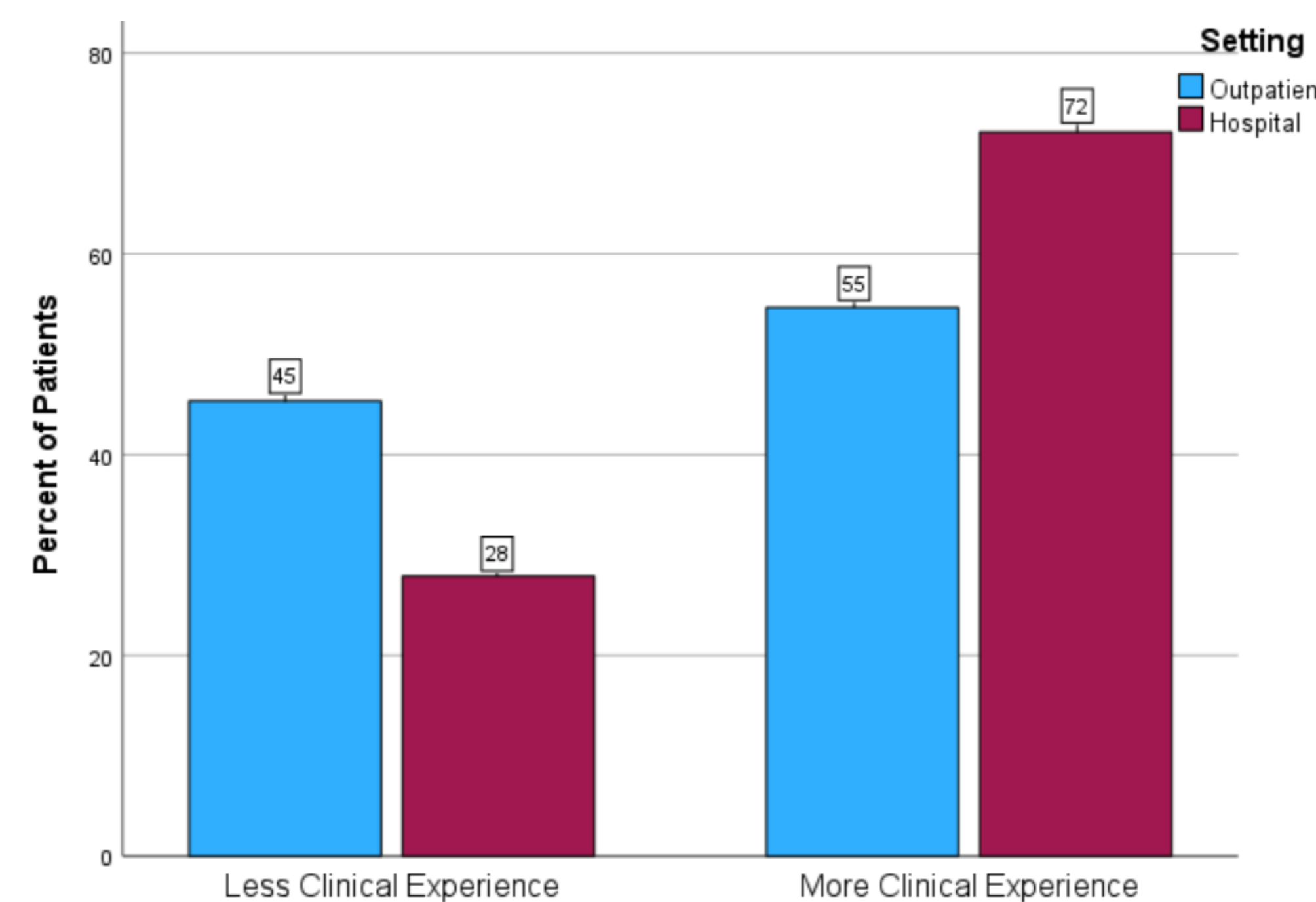


Figure 2. A bar graph depicting patient perception of the levels of clinical experience associated with students in hospital and outpatient settings.

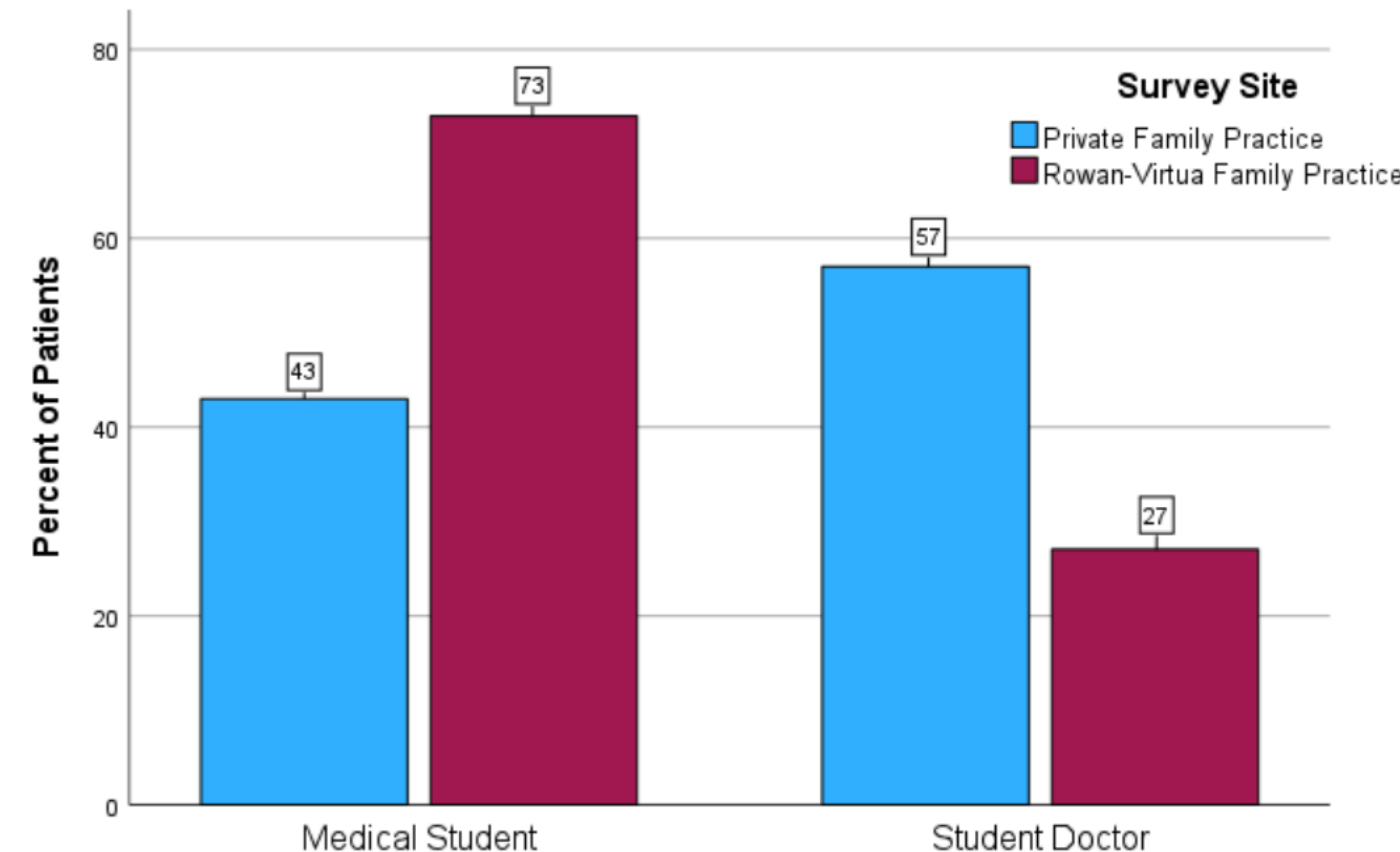


Figure 3. A bar graph depicting patient preferences of the titles, “medical student” and “student doctor” compared in university affiliated family practice and private family practice.

- In an outpatient setting, most patients perceived the term “student doctor” as an individual with more clinical experience, compared to the term “medical student” (p=.007).
- Most patients believed that students rotating in a hospital setting had more clinical experience than students rotating in an outpatient setting (p<.001).
- Patients from the university-affiliated family practices had stronger preferences towards the term “medical student” than patients from the private family practice (p<.001).

Demographics

Of the 259 patients who responded to the survey:

- 64.9% were White and 62.9% were female.
- The mean age of respondents was 51.6 years old.
- 70.7% of respondents received at least some college education.
- 73% of respondents worked at an occupation level of “skilled” or greater.
- 25.8% worked in educational services, healthcare, or social assistance industries.

Conclusion

- Introductions using the term “medical student” allowed patients to more clearly understand the student’s education level and experience in university affiliated practices.
- Use of this knowledge will lead to more positive interactions between students and the patients they care for.
- Implementation of a standardized introduction including “medical student” will further enhance a holistic osteopathic clinical environment by fostering an understanding of the training level of students in their care team.
- Future research exploring additional areas in patient satisfaction of students will further enhance the role of the medical student in clinical care.

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