

Do Premedical Students Fear Being Sued?

TO THE EDITOR: I commend John M. Chuck, MD, for addressing (in the March 1996 issue) whether or not premedical students know what they are facing.¹ The raw data presented in the article were not subjected to statistical quantitation, however, making them hard to interpret. For example, the statement that “far fewer than half” of the premedical students surveyed would be discouraged from pursuing a medical career because of the fear of being sued is misleading. Of the 84 premedical students surveyed, 32 indicated that they would be discouraged by the fear of being sued. When the z approximation and χ^2 tests are done, 32 of 84 is not significantly different from 42 of 84.² Alternatively, confidence limits can be calculated for the proportion 32 of 84. The 95% confidence interval for 32 of 84 (38%) ranges from 23 of 84 (27%) to 41 of 84 (49%) using the continuity correction.^{3(p121)} Thus, by using statistics, it would be fair to say that “nearly half” of the premedical students would be discouraged from pursuing a medical career because of the fear of being sued. This is a much different conclusion than the one presented in the article. The area of Dr Chuck’s research is highly intriguing, and thus it would be interesting to statistically quantitate the raw data before drawing any conclusions.

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