

# “The Vagina Monologues” Teaches Doctors Empathy and Communication

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## Introduction

Medical school curricula excel at scientific training but decreasing physician empathy and communication have inspired educators to seek novel methods to train more well-rounded doctors<sup>1</sup>. Can acting in “The Vagina Monologues” offer medical schools a vehicle to teach communication skills and empathy?

## Methodology

An online survey was administered to twenty-four practicing physicians who had participated in “The Vagina Monologues” during medical school. The anonymous survey had five short answer and twelve Likert scale questions.

## Literature cited

1. Hojat, M., Mangione, S., Nasca, T.J., et al. 2004. An empirical study of decline in empathy in medical school. *Medical Education* 38(9), pp. 934–941.
2. Goldman, M.L., Shah, R.N. and Bernstein, C.A. 2015. Depression and suicide among physician trainees: recommendations for a national response. *JAMA psychiatry* 72(5), pp. 411–412.

## Results

*How did participation in “The Vagina Monologues” affect medical competencies?*

*(Likert scale: 5 = strongly agree)*

### Agreements:

- Comfort talking about sexual health with patients (mean 4.6)
- Empathy (mean 4.5)
- Conscientiousness towards peers (mean 4.5)
- Open-mindedness (mean 4.5)

### Disagreements:

- Understanding female anatomy (mean 3.2)
- Toll on academic performance (mean 1.3)

“It taught me how to think and talk about difficult issues with colleagues, which directly translated to my ability to confidently talk about difficult issues with patients.”

“I learned about compassion and empathy both from reading the monologues [and] rehearsing with a group of amazing women,”

“[The Vagina Monologues] gave me the confidence to speak up for myself.”

“I feel more comfortable opening up to my peers, especially about my perceived faults.”

### Short answer themes:

Community | Increased confidence | Empathy  
Appreciation of diversity | Public Speaking Skills



## Conclusions

“The Vagina Monologues” can be used to teach medical students communication skills and empathy, while also supporting student well-being.

The emphasis on community in the responses substantiates that participation in the show fosters peer support. This is important for improving wellness in a population at high risk for depression and isolation.<sup>2</sup>

## Acknowledgments

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## Further information

Please email [mhn001@students.jefferson.edu](mailto:mhn001@students.jefferson.edu) if you have a question or comment.