



# Is a Female Always a Woman and a Male always a Man? Sex and Gender Terminology in the M1 and M2 Courses at MCW

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## BACKGROUND

Sex is a biological concept based on chromosomes and differential gene expression; gender is a social construct based on societal roles and self expression.<sup>1-2</sup> Sex and gender terms are very important for both sex and gender-based medicine (SGM) topics as well as for treating LGBTQ+ patients. Research demonstrates a paucity of both SGM topics and LGBTQ+ curricula in medical education.<sup>2-3</sup> Medical educators have a responsibility to understand, correctly use, and teach appropriate sex and gender terminology. This will help future providers to both better understand SGM concepts as well as feel more comfortable caring for patients across the gender spectrum.

## METHODS

This project had two parts:

- 1. Survey sent to all preclinical course directors (PCDs)** at MCW. They answered the following:
  - My course included description of sex and gender terminology (Y/N)
  - Include any additional information/specific cases when your course covered sex and gender terminology
- 2. Data from a curriculum audit of the preclinical courses during the 2020-2021 academic year.** -3 M1s and 4 M2s audited each lecture in their preclinical courses. They answered the following:
  - was SGM content included (Y/N)
  - was appropriate SGM terminology used (Y/N/NA)
  - details on SGM content discussed, such as terms used to discuss pregnancy and inclusion of cis/transgender terms

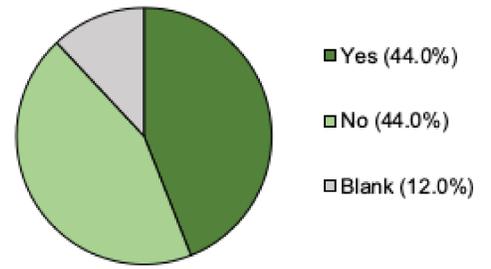
Auditor responses to questions were informed by class slides, notes, and terms spoken by lecturers. The nuances of "appropriate terminology" were discussed at length among the research team.

- "Appropriate" sex terms: male, female, intersex, use of anatomical terms or names of hormones
- "Appropriate" gender terms: man, woman
- For case studies, any language was considered correct

At least one student filled out a survey per lecture. The final dataset contained one entry for each session that merged all the auditors' observations and comments.

## RESULTS

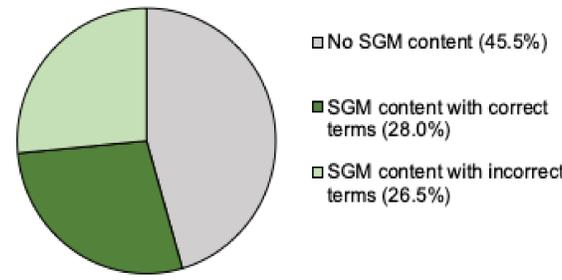
Distribution of responses to "My course included description of correct sex and gender terminology" (N=25)



PCD responses to "include any additional information or specific cases when your course covered sex and gender terminology":

- Some listed related topics and associated terms (E.g. This was relevant when we discussed...pelvic anatomy, reproductive hormones, etc.)
- Some indicated SGM topics were not relevant to their course.
- One said correct terminology depends on lecturer

Distribution of SGM Content and Terms in Preclinical Curriculum (N=604)



### Audit findings:

- Every preclinical course contained sex and gender terms
- 8 (1.3%) sessions included cis- or transgender distinction
- ~10% of lectures discussed pregnancy; 75% of the time lecturers said "pregnant women"

Audit Themes	Examples
Inconsistent or interchangeable use of terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Male/female terms in the presentation materials, said "men/women" verbally</li> <li>Switching back and forth between male and man; switching back and forth between female and woman</li> <li>"Female gender" or "male gender"</li> </ul>
Use of gender terms to discuss sex-based topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reporting a statistic for a "pregnant woman" or "postmenopausal woman"</li> <li>X-linked diseases more prevalent in "boys" or "men"</li> <li>Associating anatomy with gender: use of "men" or "women" to discuss genitalia or organs of the genitourinary tract</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

Both educators and students would benefit from a deeper understanding of the difference between sex and gender and their applications to human health and illness. As such, we have created the following suggestions for classroom instruction:

- Use sex or gender terms reported in the literature that describes the topic.
- For sex, use terms "male/female" or "biological male/biological female."
- For gender, use terms "man/woman/men/women."
- Consistently and intentionally use **either** sex or gender terms (male/female or man/woman, respectively).
- Use anatomical terms (e.g. "the pregnant uterus" or "the prostate") instead of assigning gender.
- When discussed pregnancy/menopause, one option is to say "pregnant individuals" or "postmenopausal people."
- For X-linked diseases, say they're more prevalent in "biological males."

This will help future healthcare professionals by applying this language to the broader context of SGM topics and preparing them to care for a growing population of LGBTQ+-identifying individuals.

**Next step:** work with curriculum redesign team to implement these suggestions.

- Limitations:**
- Any language in case examples was considered correct
  - Sex and gender are related and can be hard to differentiate in medical circumstances
  - Sex and gender terms are often poorly defined, or not defined, in medical literature

## REFERENCES

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