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5-2023

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Studying Grey's Anatomy: A Look into the Demographics of Cases Presented on Prime Time Medical Dramas

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Background: Medical dramas are defined as a television show or movie that is centered on a hospital or other medical facility. Popular medical dramas like Grey's Anatomy and Chicago Med have a significant following, with 4.21 million and 6.52 million viewers, respectively, in their most recent seasons.

Significance of the Problem: Previous studies have shown that medical dramas can influence individuals' views and expectations of the healthcare system. One aspect of medical dramas that could potentially affect viewers are the demographics of patients represented and their respective health outcomes.

Objective: Analysis of patient demographics depicted in medical dramas has not been heavily reported. The goal of this study was to compare the demographics of two current, primetime medical dramas: Grey's Anatomy and Chicago Med.

Methods: Two of the top ranked, ongoing medical dramas were chosen, with one assigned to each of the two researchers. A random sequence generator from Random.org was used to randomize the order of the episodes, and each researcher watched 50 hours of their assigned medical drama. Patient demographics, diagnoses, and deaths were recorded and totaled at the end of the 50 hours. Percentages were then calculated in order to compare differences and similarities between the two medical dramas.

Results: A total of 599 cases were analyzed. Between the two shows, 26.5% cases were pediatric. 28% of all Chicago Med patients were children, while 25% were for Grey's Anatomy. The percent of cases highlighted in the shows following nonwhite patients was 35% for Chicago Med and 30% for Grey's Anatomy, with a total of 32.8% nonwhite patient cases represented between the shows. On Chicago Med, 14.3% nonwhite patients died, while 13.9% of white patients died. On Grey's Anatomy, 8.5% patients of color died, while 9.46% white patients died. In total, between the shows, 12.1% of nonwhite patients died, while 12.0% of white patients died.

Conclusions: Overall, the two medical dramas, Grey's Anatomy and Chicago Med, were comparable in their patient demographic distribution. Both shows predominantly featured adult populations, with an average of a quarter of the cases being pediatric. There was also a consistent predominance of white patients in both shows, with an average one third of patients being nonwhite. Notably, both shows had a similar mortality rate between white and nonwhite patients.