

# NextGen DO: A Pre-Medical Outreach Program to Promote Early Exposure to Osteopathic Medicine

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## Introduction

Osteopathic medicine emphasizes treating the body as a unit with a natural tendency toward health and self-healing. Despite its growth, awareness of osteopathic philosophy and training remains limited among students exploring medical careers. Early exposure during high school, when career choices are actively forming, can enhance awareness of osteopathic medicine as a potential pathway. The NextGenDO program was developed as a single-day immersive event to introduce high school students to osteopathic medicine through gamified activities, hands-on learning, and interaction with medical students. This study assessed whether the program increased familiarity with osteopathic medicine, strengthened confidence in pursuing medicine, and sparked greater interest in the D.O. pathway.

## Methods

This prospective, observational study was conducted at the Orlando College of Osteopathic Medicine. Twenty-six high school students (grades 9–12) enrolled in medical track programs participated voluntarily in the single-day event. Pre- and post-surveys assessed familiarity with osteopathic medicine, interest in becoming a physician, confidence in pursuing a medical career, and knowledge of the pathway to becoming a physician. Likert scale questions and demographic data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to determine statistical significance.

## Results

Out of 26 eligible participants, 23 completed the pre-survey, and 21 completed the post-survey.

**Familiarity with Osteopathic Medicine:** Pre-survey, 82.6% of participants had heard of a D.O., but familiarity was limited. Post-survey, familiarity significantly increased ( $p = 0.0000602$ ).

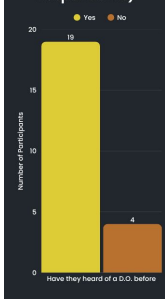
**Interest in Becoming a Physician:** Descriptive gains were observed, with 52.4% of participants reporting they were “extremely interested” post-event, though this change was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.311$ ).

**Confidence in Pursuing Medicine:** Confidence levels improved, with 85.7% of participants reporting they were “very” or “extremely” confident post-event, though this change was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.495$ ).

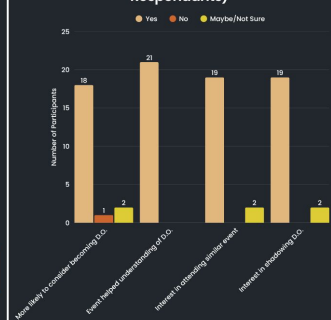
**Post-Event Responses:** 85.7% of participants were more likely to consider becoming a D.O., 90.5% expressed interest in shadowing a D.O., and 90.5% were eager to attend similar events.

## Pre- and Post-Survey Knowledge and Interest

Baseline Knowledge & Interest (23 Respondants)



Post Knowledge & Interest (21 Respondants)



## Discussion

The NextGenDO program successfully increased familiarity with osteopathic medicine among high school students. While changes in career interest and confidence were not statistically significant, the overwhelmingly positive post-event responses highlight the program’s impact. Limitations included the small sample size and high baseline interest levels, which may have reduced the ability to detect significant changes. Despite these challenges, the findings support the value of early exposure programs in enhancing awareness of osteopathic medicine and inspiring future physicians.

## Conclusion

NextGenDO provided high school students with meaningful early exposure to osteopathic medicine, resulting in significant improvements in familiarity with the D.O. profession and strong interest in continued engagement. Expanding and replicating similar initiatives may help address physician shortages, support workforce diversity, and enhance awareness of osteopathic medicine as a distinct and valuable pathway within the healthcare system.