

EDITORIAL

Promoting Communication Skills during Basic Science Teaching in the Medical Curriculum

Outcome-based medical education (OBME) is a widely accepted approach in medical education. It has been implemented in various forms in many medical schools and residency programs around the world. Practiced in many countries, outcome - based medical education focuses on several key areas, including:

1. Patient care: high-quality, patient-centered care, consistent with current standards of practice.
2. Medical knowledge: thorough understanding of the medical knowledge required to provide appropriate care to patients.
3. Clinical skills: demonstrate proficiency in the clinical skills required to diagnose and treat patients.
4. Interpersonal and communication skills: effectively communicate with patients, families, and other healthcare providers.
5. Professionalism: demonstrate the values and behaviors of a responsible and ethical healthcare professional.
6. Systems-based practice: knowledge and skills to effectively navigate and improve the healthcare system in which they practice.
7. Continuous quality improvement: ability to critically evaluate their own performance and make necessary changes for improvement.

8. Inter-professional collaboration: ability to work effectively with other healthcare professionals from different disciplines.

Of the main outcomes, medical knowledge and clinical skills have traditionally been the main focus of the medical curriculum in many medical schools. However effective communication skills are essential for success in the medical field, and its importance should be emphasized throughout the entire medical education process.

Contrary to the common belief, there can be many opportunities for the communication skills to be promoted and developed during the early years in the medical school.

Developing communication skills, including reading, writing, speaking and listening in formal or informal settings will empower the undergraduate giving confidence and self-satisfaction from an early point in his or her career.

There are numerous methods to promote communication skills in the first year of medical school during the teaching of basic sciences. A conducive environment showing sensitivity to cultural, social, and linguistic diversity will promote and encourage the new entrant to engage in the activities in promoting communication skills. These activities are best done incorporated with the real-world scenarios in collaboration with the basic sciences teaching and learning activities. Small group activities / discussions and problem-

based learning sessions are ideal settings. This can include providing opportunities for students to practice communication skills in their day to day practice in the academic settings as well as in early clinical exposure settings, interacting with patients and other healthcare professionals.

Active listening is an essential component of effective communication, so it is important to encourage students to practice active listening and to give and receive feedback on their communication skills as well.

Although not emphasized enough, dissections and practical sessions serve as a good setting as the communication is driven by the learning task during the group activity.

Student seminars where students make preparations and presentations on their own under the guidance of an academic around a clinical scenario is another golden opportunity for promoting communication skills.

Providing opportunities for extra-curricular activities such as quizzes, debates, public speaking, exhibitions for the public, drama and theater groups and community projects can help students develop their communication skills in a more relaxed and low-pressure setting. With the advent of computer based and IT related tools, students are far head in utilizing many applications which help them to enhance their communication skills.

Focusing on assessments, both formative and summative forms play an important role. Especially while practicing for these, students

will further enhance their communication skills. Viva voce examinations conducted in a structured manner and in a friendly setting will be an excellent way of improving one to one communication capabilities.

Teachers in basic sciences should consider communication skills as an important program learning outcome and should not only grab each opportunity to promote communication skills but also document and incorporate them in the written curriculum for the perusal of reviewers and accreditors.

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