

Short communication

Assessment of Postgraduate Teaching in Community Medicine at a Medical College-A Focus Group Discussion with Postgraduate students

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Abstract:

Background:

There is a need to understand the current needs and expectations of postgraduate medical students in the state of Gujarat as no common postgraduate curriculum is in force.

Objective: To know the changes required in postgraduate teaching in the subject of community medicine, as perceived by the postgraduate students.

Methods:

Current study utilized "Focus Group Discussion" with postgraduate medical students in the subject of Community Medicine as a method of enquiry.

Results:

Active participation in the departmental research activities, managing clinical posting, cooperative senior teachers and attending undergraduate lectures regularly were the facilitating factors identified. Factors impeding teaching were: Lack of postgraduate teaching schedule and absence of assessment of performance.

Conclusion:

A qualitative method such as Focus Group Discussion with Postgraduate students appears to be a promising tool to identify the current needs of the postgraduate students with reference to teaching in community medicine.

Key Words: postgraduate teaching, community medicine, focus group discussion

Introduction: Post graduation, teaching and training in Community Medicine is

spread over three years, after MBBS. In the state of Gujarat, Medical Colleges are affiliated to different Universities; hence no common curriculum is followed. There is a need to understand the current requirements and expectations of postgraduate students as the specialty of Community Medicine is gaining more and more importance in the public health practice. Restructuring curriculum in line with Medical Council of India recommendation¹ and current National public health requirements is needed. Substantial restructuring of curricula is required for development of competencies not only in epidemiology, health management, health education, and health informatics, but also in public health policy, health economics, environment and occupational health and health promotion²

Current study utilized "Focus Group Discussion" (FGD) with postgraduate medical students in the subject of Community Medicine as a method of enquiry. The research question being; "What changes in postgraduate teaching are required in the subject of community medicine at a Medical College, as perceived by the postgraduate students?" Focus Group Discussion permits free and focused participation to explore the issues at hand.³

Material and Methods:

The Focus Group Discussion was conducted with nine postgraduate students currently registered for post graduation in Community Medicine at a Medical

College in Gujarat. Both the moderator and note-keeper were trained in qualitative research. A semi structured guideline was prepared with the objectives; to get an account of the current scenario of Postgraduate teaching and training; to understand the facilitating factors and impeding factors by taking views of students registered in the department and thereby, learn from them the teaching changes needed as perceived by them.

At the beginning the participants were explained the purpose of the discussion and a verbal consent was taken. They were explained that they had the liberty to refuse to answer any question that they did not like. There were no disturbances & almost all could remain present throughout the discussion. No audio-tape was used. The discussion lasted for one and half hours and the notes were expanded within 24 hrs of the discussion.

Results & Discussion:

Study Setting:

The FGD was set up in a quiet comfortable departmental conference room, seated in a circle bereft of any disturbance. Their informed verbal consent was taken and purpose of the study explained. The participants were those students who were registered for MD in community medicine. They had undergone one to five terms in the subject at the time of study, i.e. they were at different levels of seniority and work experience. The moderator, principal author of this paper, is an associate professor with over 19 years of experience. The note keeper is a teacher in the department with eight years of experience.

Field Posting:

Postgraduate students are posted in various public health institutions for a period of one to four weeks. Most of them felt that these postings need restructuring. They also feel that the content of “what to learn” out of each such visit should be defined. With increasing emphasis on

Urban Health more time may be given to posting at Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC). Visit to institutes located outside Baroda may be considered. Overall, it needs to be more structured and defined.

Field surveys and other assigned activities: Students felt that for each such survey, identified team should be trained before survey. Data management and computer use should be taught to the participants.

Dissertation: As it is compulsory prerequisite, the topics for the same should be selected by the end of first year. Research methodology should be taught to all postgraduates in the first half of first year. In fact, they went on to suggest that, Community Medicine department can take lead in the same and carry out such a specific teaching for all Postgraduates at the various departments of Medical College Baroda year after year regularly.

Factors impeding PG teaching are:

*Lack of postgraduate teaching schedule/irregularly conducted journal club/Postgraduate presentations

*And lack of system of assessment of performance during Postgraduate education and learning

Factors facilitating are:

*Active participation (by Postgraduates) in the departmental services and research activities

*Managing clinical postings

*Co-operative and receptive senior teachers

*Attending Undergraduate lectures regularly

Additional inputs:

Majority suggested that senior teachers must share new information after attending conference / workshop / seminar or State / National level meetings, etc...

- Many of them suggested that students themselves must take initiative to make presentation of topics of current interest and relevance.

- Need to increase use of library
- Pursuing modular training by reading set of modules of various health programmes under guidance of Assistant Professors regularly.
- Interestingly, some of them were of the opinion that soon after undergraduate lectures, additionality and newer details of the same topic should be followed up with Postgraduates, giving reference material, and suggested references to read up.

Final note:

At the end the facilitator thanked the participants. The participants expressed that it was indeed a fruitful exercise which gave them an impetus & an insight into Postgraduate learning.

Recommendations:

- A qualitative method such as Focus Group Discussion with Postgraduate students appears to be a promising tool to improve the teaching and training standards.
- This would also lead to better teacher's and student's participation in designing and implementation of curriculum.

Limitation:

Though the participants had volunteered, hierarchal relationship perhaps could have influenced flow of information. Besides having known the moderator as teacher also perhaps would influence 'issues' raised in some of the domains of enquiry; based on personal preferences or otherwise.

Acknowledgement:

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References:

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