

PROGRAMME REPORT

Experience from a Community Placement Programme for Medical Students

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Context

Community-oriented learning has been realized as important elements in undergraduate curriculum since the inception of our School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia. The Student Personal and Professional Development Programme (SPPDP) has been introduced to facilitate and coordinate training in such areas in the undergraduate training. We describe in this article a community-oriented activity known as the 'Community Placement Programme' in our institution.

Reason for the idea

Medical training must be holistic in its approach and could no longer emphasis on building up knowledge alone. The interpersonal attributes such as leadership, communication skills, professionalism and teamwork as well as personnel attributes of being ethical and morally upright, are the other important elements of medical education. The importance of promoting and nurturing positive personal qualities and professional development among future doctor are becoming more apparent within healthcare. Many evidences showed that it has effects on the quality of care provided. This programme was developed to enhance the students' self-awareness of the importance of the formation of positive personal and professional qualities to become a caring doctor as well as to assist them in developing self-improvement strategies to develop their personal qualities. A "hands-on" activity is thought to be an alternative approach for lecture-based teaching in this area of concern.

Methods

The programme was run over one month. The objectives of this programme were to enable students to explore various skills such as leadership, teamwork and community services, to understand the importance of those skills and to develop self-improvement strategies in improving those skills for becoming better students as well as future doctors. They were

given some tasks in several small groups of ten students to plan, organize and implement activities in a selected community such as disabled people, orphans, and unfortunate groups. Each group was supervised by an academic lecturer. Discussion sessions were held to explore the learning experience gained from this programme. After going through the programme, they should be able to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and develop their own self-improvement strategies to strengthen their personal and professional skills in the future.

Evaluation

A total of 147 undergraduate medical students participated in the programme. At the end of the programme, evaluation questionnaires were distributed to participants. Participants were asked to rate the success of the programme in achieving the objectives and its overall usefulness. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 12. The evaluation showed that the participants rated the overall programme as highly useful (80.6%) and as having achieved the objectives (80.1%). They perceived that this programme helped them to improve their personal and professional skills such as leadership (70.0%), team work (71.4%), community service (87.1%), volunteerism (85.0%), and empathy (89.1%). In general, it was a well-accepted programme by medical students. Similar programme may be considered as relevant to be incorporated in other medical schools.

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