

Original Article

Perceptions of Medical Educators Regarding the Integration of Standardized Teaching-learning Modules for Training Communication Skills in Medical Undergraduate Students

Praveen S Ganganahalli¹, Rekha Udgiri²

Background : The doctor-patient relationship is profoundly influenced by effective communication, leading to positive outcomes in terms of patient health and satisfaction. When medical undergraduates are trained in Communication Skills through a standardized module, it results in improved treatment adherence, decreased malpractice claims and notable advancements in psychological and physical well-being across various health conditions.

Aims and Objectives : This study aims to evaluate the perceptions of medical teachers in India concerning the training of medical undergraduates in Communication Skills using a standardized module.

Materials and Methods : An observational survey was conducted to assess the views of medical college teachers regarding the training of Communication Skills to medical undergraduate students. The survey utilized a pre-structured proforma containing questionnaires and employed a standardized teaching-learning module delivered through an online link-sharing platform.

Results : The faculty members hold a clear and robust belief in the importance of integrating Communication Skills training directly into the medical curriculum, with particular emphasis on community-based training. They firmly believe that such training not only enhances students' communication abilities but also fosters empathy towards patients.

Conclusion : The perceptions of medical educators highlight the potential benefits of incorporating Communication Skills training modules into the medical curriculum. By doing so, it promotes better patient care and contributes to overall improved healthcare outcomes.

[J Indian Med Assoc 2024; 122(4): 15-8]

Key words : Perception, Communication Skills, Module, Faculty, Students.

Effective communication with patients significantly impacts the doctor-patient rapport, fostering positive health outcomes and patient satisfaction. It promotes better treatment adherence, reduces malpractice claims and enhances psychological and physical well-being across diverse health issues. Nevertheless, mastering communication in clinical settings is challenging, demanding clinicians to cultivate a repertoire of intricate skills. While these skills may not be innate, they are acquirable through education and practice. Numerous studies demonstrate that educational interventions typically enhance communication proficiency among medical trainees¹.

Patients should actively participate in both diagnosis and treatment, acting as partners in their healthcare journey. This involvement not only empowers patients to take ownership of their well-being but also

Department of Community Medicine, BLDEDU Shri B M Patil Medical College, Vijayapura, Karnataka 586103

¹MD, Associate Professor and Corresponding Author

²MD, Professor

Received on : 18/08/2023

Accepted on : 23/09/2023

Editor's Comment :

- Community-based modules designed to improve communication skills among medical undergraduate students positively impact their development. These skills are essential for fostering strong doctor-patient relationships, which are vital for effective healthcare.
- Medical educators believe that integrating these modules into the curriculum could benefit significantly, ultimately improving patient care and healthcare outcomes.

enhances compliance and engagement within a patient-centered healthcare system. Physicians bear the responsibility of facilitating this collaborative approach, known as 'shared decision making,' through effective communication techniques. The Kalamazoo Consensus Statement outlines seven fundamental communication tasks crucial for physician-patient interactions: building rapport, initiating dialogue, collecting relevant information, understanding the patient's viewpoint, exchanging information, agreeing on solutions and concluding the discussion².

The incorporation of Communication Skills (CS) into academic instruction reveals notable deficiencies and challenges. One critical oversight in designing and

executing such programs is the insufficient consideration of their effects on the recipients. This oversight is particularly pertinent in the case of medical students and their perception of such educational approaches¹.

A study was undertaken to evaluate the perception and attitude of medical students in Central India towards the Communication Skills Lab (CSL) and its associated teaching module. A significant majority of the students (96.43%) expressed that the training had notably enhanced their communication abilities with patients. Furthermore, they advocated for the integration of such training into the standard teaching curriculum nationwide. The implementation of basic Communication Skills training could be seamlessly incorporated into the early stages of undergraduate medical education through a well-designed, engaging, and widely accepted teaching module³.

In this context, a research project has been developed to explore how faculty members perceive the teaching of Communication Skills to medical undergraduates. The project will employ standardized modules for teaching, learning and assessment to facilitate this investigation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey was conducted to gauge the opinions of medical college educators in India regarding the instruction of Communication Skills to undergraduate medical students. This observational study utilized a predetermined questionnaire format, incorporating a standardized teaching module. Before initiating the study, approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee and participating teachers provided informed consent.

The survey was disseminated to educators from various medical colleges throughout India via a Google Form link shared across social media platforms including WhatsApp, Telegram and email. Subsequently, the data collected through the Google Form were exported into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis, wherein frequency distributions and correlations among variables were examined.

OBSERVATIONS

The survey received participation from a total of 105 teachers from various regions across India. After analysing the information collected, the following observations were made (Table 1).

Among those involved, the predominant group comprises faculty members (56%) holding titles such as assistant, lecturer, or tutor within the Department of Community Medicine (52%) across both

Table 1 — Distribution of the Participants according to Academic Characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Designation :		
Professor	35	33
Associate Professor	11	11
Assistant Professor	48	45
Lecturer/SR	11	11
Department :		
Community Medicine	55	52
Biochemistry	08	08
Microbiology	10	10
Physiology	11	11
Pathology	04	04
Clinical dept	10	10
Dentistry	05	05
Type of Institute :		
Government	42	40
Private	40	38
Deemed to be University	23	22
State of Working :		
Karnataka	65	61
Andhra Pradesh	08	08
Kerala	05	05
Maharashtra	17	16
Tamil Nadu	05	05
West Bengal	05	05
Medical Education Unit member :		
Yes	65	61
No	41	39
Medical Education Training :		
RBCW only	82	77
RBCW + ACME	19	18
RBCW + FAIMER	10	10

Governmental and private institutions, with a nearly balanced representation (40% versus 38%) in Karnataka state (61%). Within this cohort, 61% were affiliated with the medical education unit and nearly all have completed fundamental training in medical education, with 28% having pursued advanced training.

As per Table 2, the faculty holds a firm conviction regarding the vital need for integrating Communication Skills training directly into undergraduate courses, particularly emphasizing community-based training. They argue that such training not only improves students' communication prowess but also nurtures empathy towards patients. Additionally, the faculty acknowledges the significance of instituting a standardized Teaching-learning Module to provide students with communication skills uniformly. This method enables them to embrace emerging teaching and assessment methodologies, essential for successfully implementing a Competency-based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum.

Table 3 outlines various challenges encountered, including logistical hurdles in coordinating sessions to accommodate all participants, managing diverse group dynamics, addressing time constraints for

Table 2 — Perception of faculty about training UGs in Communication Skills

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Good communication skills offer advantages beyond just fostering a better doctor-patient relationship	-	-	-	11%	89%
Is the inclusion of communication skills training in the undergraduate medical course perceived as effective?	-	-	11%	27%	61%
The skill required for taking a good history is not as extensive as that needed for conducting a physical examination of the patient.	50%	38.9%	-	5%	5.6%
Training in communication skills is found to be more effective in a clinical setting compared to a community setting.	27.8%	27.8%	16.7%	16.7%	11.1%
When taught in a community setting, communication skills training can significantly enhance empathy in medical students.	5.6%	5.6%	-	38.9%	50%
Utilizing a standardized Teaching-learning Module for skills training leads to improved outcomes.	5.6%	11.1%	11.1%	27.8%	44.4%
The implementation of a standardized Teaching-Learning Module will aid faculty in uniformly and effectively training students.	-	-	5.6%	38.9%	55.6%
The utilization of a standardized Teaching-learning Module will facilitate the appropriate training of skills and ensure their effective acquisition.	-	-	5.6%	44.4%	50%
Employing formative assessment methods for in-course evaluation of students' Communication Skills will prove to be more effective.	-	-	5.6%	61.1%	33.3%

Table 3 — challenges faced & opinion about small group community-based training

Challenges faced during implementation of small group teaching (Multiple answers) :	
Faculty deficiency	80%
Inadequate infrastructure	54%
Stick to traditional method of teaching	61%
Resistance to adapt newer techniques of teaching	65%
Poor active participation of students	54%
Student faculty ratio	58%
Teachers training into newer techniques of teaching	60%
Time constraints	74%

covering essential content, ensuring sufficient resource allocation, effectively assessing individual student performance, providing valuable feedback, training faculty members in small group teaching methodologies, overcoming resistance to change, dealing with student preparedness issues, and determining the ideal group size to encourage meaningful discussions and active learning.

DISCUSSION

The current research explored the viewpoints of faculty members engaged in teaching medical undergraduates. These faculty members express a strong acknowledgment of the importance of integrating Communication Skills training into the undergraduate curriculum, particularly emphasizing community-based training. Additionally, the study highlighted several hurdles that need attention, such as logistical challenges in scheduling sessions to suit all participants, effectively managing time constraints to cover essential content, ensuring proper resource allocation and overcoming resistance to change and embracing active learning methodologies.

Educators' appreciation for the relevance and

authenticity of Simulated Patient training grows with teaching tenure. This trend seems to be shaped by various factors, including the educator's internal or external status, their own encounters with communication training during medical education, and the specific medical discipline they teach. The utilization of Simulated Patients in communication training holds significant value for medical educators due to its adaptable nature and wide-ranging relevance across medical fields⁴.

Richard S and colleagues conducted a study on the perception of doctor-patient communication training among medical students. Their findings revealed that 55.6% of respondents felt adequately trained in this aspect. While 85.9% received the theoretical courses, only 64.6% had the chance to supplement their learning with practical experience. A significant majority expressed a need for more hands-on practice in Communication Skills. Moreover, all participants agreed on the necessity of integrating more practical communication training into the curriculum⁵.

Ruiz-Moral and colleagues investigated the viewpoints of fourth-year medical students regarding a Communication Skills training course featuring experiential learning elements. They discovered that while students found this approach beneficial, it also induced significant stress, particularly during small-group sessions where they interacted with standardized patients and during summative assessments⁶.

In their research aimed at crafting, introducing and assessing a structured, validated module on Communication Skills for interns, Sinjita Dutta and colleagues discovered notable findings. They observed

a significant increase in post-training knowledge scores (16.68 ± 2.5), which were notably higher than the pre-training scores (15.45 ± 2.9). Moreover, there was a substantial rise in self-assessed knowledge (11.08 ± 3.7 to 17.23 ± 3.3) and skills (9.60 ± 4.6 to 16 ± 2.9) before and after the training, respectively. Impressively, all interns exhibited a positive attitude towards Communication Skills, as evidenced by scores on the Communication Skills Assessment Scale (CSAS). Interns also performed well on assessment using the SEGUE framework, with a mean score of 16.6 ± 3.59 . Feedback from interns, as indicated by the satisfaction index of survey items, ranged from 82.5% to 93%, reflecting high levels of satisfaction. Faculty members unanimously agreed on the relevance, usefulness and potential applicability of the module across other Departments for Communication Skills training⁷.

Aggarwal and colleagues conducted a study to evaluate the influence of training on clinical skills among Phase I MBBS students at a Government Medical College. Participants welcomed this participant-centric, assessment-based approach to teaching and learning. They found the sessions on effective communication engaging and enjoyable and expressed a strong commitment to applying the knowledge gained in practical settings⁸.

CONCLUSION

The results highlight how modules focused on enhancing Communication Skills positively influence the development of medical undergraduate students. These skills are crucial for building robust doctor-patient relationships. The views of medical educators suggest that integrating these modules into the curriculum could bring about significant benefits, leading to better patient care and ultimately improving healthcare outcomes. Nevertheless, additional

research and implementation endeavours are necessary to thoroughly evaluate and refine the integration of these modules into medical education.

REFERENCES

- 1 Ruiz-Moral R, Gracia de Leonardo C, Caballero Martínez F, Monge Martín D — Medical students' perceptions towards learning communication skills: a qualitative study following the 2-year training programme. *Int J Med Educ* 2019; **10**: 90-97. doi: 10.5116/ijme.5cbd.7e96. PMID: 31055522; PMCID: PMC6766390.
- 2 Graf J, Loda T, Zipfel S — Communication skills of medical students: survey of self- and external perception in a longitudinally based trend study. *BMC Med Educ* 2020; **20**: 149. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02049-w>
- 3 Tanwani R, Chandki R, Joshi A, Arora VK, Nyati P, Sutay S — Perception and Attitude of Medical Students towards Communication Skills Lab and Teaching Module. *J Clin Diagn Res* 2017; **11(6)**: JC12-JC14. doi: 10.7860/JCDR/2017/24858.10120. Epub 2017 Jun 1. PMID: 28764200; PMCID: PMC5535393.
- 4 Alvarez S, Schultz JH — Medical educators' perception of communication training with simulated patients: an explorative study approach. *BMC Res Notes* 2017; **10(1)**: 650. doi: 10.1186/s13104-017-2988-8. PMID: 29187258; PMCID: PMC5707823.
- 5 Richard S, Pardo D, Piquard D, Fostier P, Thomas JM, Vervier JF, *et al* — Perception of training in doctor-patient communication for students at faculty of medicine. *Revue Medicale de Bruxelles* 2012; **33(6)**: 525-30.
- 6 Ruiz-Moral R, Gracia de Leonardo C, Caballero Martínez F, Monge Martín D — Medical students' perceptions towards learning communication skills: a qualitative study following the 2-year training programme. *Int J Med Educ* 2019; **10**: 90-97. doi: 10.5116/ijme.5cbd.7e96. PMID: 31055522; PMCID: PMC6766390.
- 7 Dutta S, Mukherjee M, Shukla V, Mishra A, Saha R, Basu SS, *et al* — Introduction of Module-based Training on Communication Skills among Interns in a Tertiary Care Teaching Hospital of Kolkata, India. *Journal of Clinical & Diagnostic Research* 2022; **16(3)**.
- 8 Aggarwal P, Rawekar A, Dey SK, Roy R — Impact of an assessment-based training module on communication skills in phase I indian medical undergraduates. *Acta Med Int* 2023; **10**: 9-13.

JIMA Publishes only **ONLINE submitted Articles
through
<https://onlinejima.com>**