

Status of Learning Communication Skills in Undergraduate Medical Education According to Intern's View.

ASMAM Alam¹, F Haque², JA Ansary³, MS Amin⁴, HK Talukder⁵

Abstract

This cross sectional descriptive study was carried out during July 2010 to June 2011 in four medical college of Dhaka city. Two government and two private medical colleges were selected according to the convenience of the researcher. One semi structured questionnaire was used to collect the information from the Intern doctors. It contained 26 questions from the variables of communication skills. The researcher himself collected the data. 218 Intern doctors returned the filled in questionnaires on the same day. Allocation of score for response of each item was based on 5 point Likert scale. The study revealed that most of the interns were not taught communication skills in their clinical classes in a structured way. But during internship period they felt that those should have been taught in a structured way. They recommended that it should be a part of course curriculum so that every student gets equal opportunity to learn these skills.

Key words: Learning, communication skill, intern

Introduction

The communication that takes place between doctor and patient provides the foundation for diagnosis and treatment, whatever the branch of clinical medicine¹. Increasing number of medical schools have included brief training course in communication skills. While there is evidence that such a course does improve student's skill². It has become increasingly clear that how doctor communicates with the patients affect the accuracy of diagnosis, compliance, satisfaction and response to investigation and treatment³.

Generally studies have clearly established that students given specialized skills training shows significantly improved interpersonal skill over traditionally trained counterparts. Trained doctors are more able to communicate warmth and understanding to patients and are more able for detecting and responding appropriately to patient's verbal and non verbal cues^{4,5,6}. So it has been observed that communication skill development is very much important in medical education⁵. To produce graduates with a range of

communication skills and attributes Liverpool University introduced communication skill learning course throughout five years. The result of the course showed that communication skills training can produce good and competent communicators⁷. In a study it was observed that student's in the trained group showed greatly increased skills in interviewing and building interpersonal relationship as a result of their communication skill training. The students were significantly better at eliciting full, relevant data from patients, they were diagnostically more efficient, but they took no longer time than their control group counterparts to elicit the information⁸. In our undergraduate curriculum there are four weeks' period of communication learning skill in community medicine⁹. In informal way there is scope for learning communication skill in clinical classes by 'history taking', by observing seniors' communication with the patient, taking consent, interpretation of result of investigation or breaking bad news to relatives of the patient by the senior doctors.

Methodology:

This was a cross sectional descriptive study carried out during July 2010 to June 2011. Voluntary respondents of 218 Intern doctors of selected four medical colleges constituted the sample. Two government and two private medical colleges were selected as per the convenience of the researcher. The researcher collected information from the interns as per the following criteria:

" At least ten intern doctors from any of the clinical subjects (medicine, surgery, gynecology, and sub specialties) of each medical college.

" At least 5 teachers from any of the clinical subjects of each medical college.

Research Instrument

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One questionnaire was structured with a space for comment of respondents was used to collect the information from the Intern doctors. It contained 26 questions from the variables of communication skills. The researcher himself collected the data. With prior permission of the authority, Intern doctors returned the filled in questionnaires on the same day. Allocation of score for response of each item was based on 5 point Likert scale.

Data processing and analysis

Data were checked and edited after collection, processed and analyzed by using SPSS software package. Data were presented in the form of tables to compare the findings.

Results

Allocation of score for response of each item was based on 5 point Likert scale. Total respondents were 218 intern doctors. The answer of the intern doctors obtained from the structured questionnaires are shown in the tables.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents as per their

Name of the Institute	Frequency	Percent
Dhaka National Medical College	53	24.3
Dhaka Medical College	63	28.9
Sir Salimullah Medical College	71	32.6
Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College	31	14.2
Total	218	100.0

institutions

Table 2 : Distribution of respondents as per their opinions regarding of teaching learning how to greet the patient , Rapport building of the patient, taking informed consent of patient before performing physical

Different events of Communication skill teaching learning in undergraduate medical education	Different levels of opinion					Total
	Strongly disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Undecided (U)	Agree (A)	Strongly agree (SA)	
"Teacher taught student's clinical class how to greet the patient before history taking"	4 (1.8%)	6 (2.8%)	9 (4.1%)	107 (49.1%)	92 (42.2%)	218
"Teacher should taught student's how to greet the patient before history taking"	2 (0.9%)	00 (0%)	4 (1.8%)	57 (26.1%)	155 (71.1%)	218
"Teachers taught student's about rapport building (gaining faith) of the patient, before dealing with them"	5 (2.3%)	18 (8.3%)	18 (8.3%)	111 (50.9%)	66 (30.3%)	218
"Rapport building (gaining faith) of the patient, before dealing with them should be taught in the clinical class"	1 (0.5%)	13 (6.0%)	8 (3.7%)	79 (36.2%)	117 (53.7%)	218
"Teachers taught student's how to take informed consent of patient before performing physical examination"	1 (0.5%)	4 (1.8%)	7 (3.2%)	98 (45.0%)	108 (49.5%)	218
"Teachers should taught student's how to take informed consent before perform physical examination"	0 (0%)	8 (3.7%)	18 (8.3%)	65 (29.8%)	127 (58.3%)	218

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nature of the disease and informing the treatment plan, in the clinical class.

Table 5 : Distribution of respondents as per their opinions regarding of teaching learning how to Break

Different events of Communication skill teaching learning in undergraduate medical education	Different levels of opinion					Total
	Strongly disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Undecided (U)	Agree (A)	Strongly agree (SA)	
"Teachers taught student's how to break the bad news to the patient and their guardian about the disease"	10 (4.6%)	42 (19.3%)	38 (17.4%)	79 (36.2%)	49 (22.5%)	218
"Teachers should taught students in clinical class, how to break the bad news to the patient and their guardian about the disease"	12 (5.5%)	14 (6.4%)	26 (11.9%)	63 (28.9%)	103 (47.2%)	218
"Teachers taught student's how a difficult situation can be managed"	10 (4.6%)	39 (17.9%)	42 (19.3%)	75 (34.4%)	52 (23.9%)	218
"Teachers should students study in clinical class, how they will handle a difficult situation"	3 (1.3%)	7 (3.2%)	29 (13.3%)	72 (33.0%)	107 (49.1%)	218
"Teachers taught student's how they will convince and refer the patient to another hospital for better management"	1 (0.5%)	4 (1.8%)	31 (14.2%)	98 (45.0%)	53 (24.3%)	218
"Teachers should taught how the student will convince and refer the patient to another hospital for better management"	11 (5%)	21 (9.5%)	13 (6%)	68 (31.2%)	105 (48.2%)	218

the bad news, handle the difficult situation and refer the patient , in the clinical class.

In the questionnaire for the interns a space was kept for comment. Only 32 of them gave opinions. The most common opinion was that communication skills should be taught in clinical class methodically and must be assessed in examination. One comment was "Teachers taught us" communication skill (CS) in the way of gossiping or sometimes when any occurrence happened. So some of us could it learn and others missed it. It should be taught in a structured way so that all students can learn. Another interesting comment was "Few teachers taught us but we were not told about it's importance or future application in practical life. So teaching not retain in our memory for a long time. Another common comment was that this study is very good if communication skills teaching is included in the curriculum. This will definitely help in reducing doctor patient chaotic relation in our country. A comment was "You are doing a very good study. If authority includes this in the MBBS curriculum it will help doctors to build good relationship with the patient". In another comment some respondents thanked the researcher for taking their opinions and a few of them thanked him for choosing these burning issues."

Discussion

This study was carried out among the Intern doctors of

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examination, in the clinical class.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents as per their opinions regarding of teaching learning how to convince the patient, to do investigation , describe

Different events of Communication skill teaching learning in undergraduate medical education	Different levels of opinion					Total
	Strongly disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Undecided (U)	Agree (A)	Strongly agree (SA)	
"Teachers taught student's how to explain patient and their guardian about the nature of the disease"	5 (2.3%)	21 (9.6%)	25 (11.5%)	104 (47.7%)	63 (28.9%)	218
"Teachers should taught 's how to explain patient and their guardian about the nature of the disease"	9 (4.1%)	15 (6.9%)	23 (10.6%)	75 (34.4%)	96 (44.4%)	218
"Teachers taught student's how to convince to do the necessary investigations to patient and their guardian"	7 (3.2%)	37 (17%)	15 (6.9%)	110 (50.5%)	49 (22.5%)	218
"Teachers should taught the student the way to convince patient and guardian to do the necessary investigations"	4 (1.8%)	27 (12.4%)	25 (11.5%)	77 (35.3%)	85 (39%)	218
"Teachers taught student's how to Explain patient and their guardian about the treatment plan"	10 (4.6%)	35 (16.1%)	34 (15.6%)	91 (41.7%)	48 (22%)	218
"Teachers should taught student's how to Explain patient and their guardian about the treatment plan to patient and their guardian"	11 (5.0%)	21 (9.6%)	24 (11.0%)	73 (33.5%)	89 (40.8%)	218

Table 4 : Distribution of respondents as per their opinions regarding of teaching learning how to motivate the patient, to receive treatment , convince for painful procedure and counseling about the life style and diet, in the clinical class.

Different events of Communication skill teaching learning in undergraduate medical education	Different levels of opinion					Total
	Strongly disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Undecided (U)	Agree (A)	Strongly agree (SA)	
"Teachers taught student's how to motivate the undecided patient and guardian to receive proper treatment"	10 (4.6%)	36 (16.5%)	33 (15.1%)	74 (33.9%)	65 (29.8%)	218
"Teachers should taught student's how to motivate the undecided patient and guardian to receive treatment"	10 (4.6%)	2 (0.9%)	24 (11.0%)	95 (43.6%)	87 (39.9%)	218
"Teachers taught student's how to convince the patient and guardian for a painful procedure"	13 (6.0%)	39 (17.9%)	40 (18.3%)	96 (44.0%)	30 (13.8%)	218
"Teachers should taught student's how to convince the patient and their guardian for a painful procedure"	14 (6.4%)	12 (5.5%)	27 (12.4%)	64 (29.4%)	101 (46.3%)	218
"Teachers taught student's how to counsel the patient about life style and Diet after hospital leaving"	3 (1.3%)	17 (7.8%)	29 (13.3%)	113 (51.8%)	52 (23.9%)	218
"Teachers should taught student's how to counselling the patient and their guardian about patient's life style and Diet after hospital leaving"	5 (2.3%)	16 (7.3%)	21 (9.6%)	81 (37.2%)	95 (43.6%)	218

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two government and two non government medical colleges of Dhaka city. Selected variables of communication skills were used in this study. Aspergen et al used similar seven main variables in their study to assess the need of communication skills teaching¹¹.

Hargie et al used different types (Demonstration of empathy, negotiation skills, nonverbal communication, sex education, etc.) of variables with some similarity (Breaking bad news, Dealing with reluctance/angry patient, explaining, giving, receiving information etc.)¹².

World over communication skills are one of the vital skills required in medical practice and considered as a core competency of undergraduate and post graduate medical education programs in developed countries¹⁴.

In our undergraduate curriculum communication skills are mainly taught in an unstructured way. After discussion of the opinions and views of the interns about the current status of communication learning and teaching it was clear to us. Whatever the students are taught, it was mainly through history taking in clinical classes in hospital ward.

In the question "how to build rapport with the patient" 89.9% answered that they should be taught about this whereas 81.2% answered that the teachers taught them. So there was disparity between expectation and happening. Aspergen et al discussed in their published article that rapport building clearly need to be taught and trained in medical school and post graduate courses¹¹.

A remarkable portion (21.6%) of interns somehow disagreed or undecided that whether they should be taught about how to explain the nature of the disease to patient and their guardians. But all interns agreed that it must be taught in a structured way either in internship or clinical settings. Many of them gave opinions that their learning must be assessed by OSCE or other through an assessment procedure which will help to retain their knowledge for a long time. This view is similar with the findings of others, who claimed that the short training course and assessment within clinical clerkship showed a long term effect².

In the question whether the interns were taught in the undergraduate classes 'how to convince the patient to do necessary investigations', most of them (72.7%) agreed that they were taught. About 11.5% were not sure that whether they need to learn it.

Regarding learning "how to explain patient about treatment plan" majority of respondents (63.7%) answered that they were taught. But one third (36.3%)

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training significantly improved the communication skills¹⁵.

Another common comment was that this study is very good for this time. If communication skills teaching is included in the curriculum this will definitely help in reducing doctor patient chaotic relation in our country. From above findings of this study it was observed that most of the variables regarding communication skills were taught in an unstructured way. But according to interns view it should be taught more and in a structured way. This finding has a similarity with the study of Cantwell & Ramirez¹⁵. They have shown in their study that 67% junior house officers felt that they lack adequate communication skills about medicine.

Conclusion:

This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out on a sample of Intern doctors and Clinical teachers of four medical colleges. Data were collected from 218 interns by using a self administered semi-structured questionnaire. Reviewing the findings of the study, it can be concluded that communication skills must be known by doctors. Most of the interns gave answers that they were not taught majority of the communication skills mentioned in this study in their MBBS course. But in internship period they felt that those should be taught in a structured way. Most of the interns and teachers agreed that it must be included in the curriculum so that all students would have chance to learn these skills.

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