

EDUCATION SECTION

USING COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT AS VENUE TO TRAIN PROFESSIONALISM: THE CYBERJAYA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this paper is to examine medical students' views on the usefulness of a community project as a venue to train professionalism.

Methods: Medical students at Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences (CUCMS) were surveyed following psychiatry community projects organized during year 4 undergraduate attachments in psychiatry.

Results: A total of 176 students returned the survey forms. A majority of medical students thought that the psychiatry community project promotes teamwork and leadership skills. About a quarter thought that it helped foster their communication ability and encouraged them to be more reflective in their daily lives. These findings were translated into the potential of the community project to train "collaborative" and "managerial" affective domain learning outcomes of the university.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that psychiatry community project or similar programmes may be useful tools to train several elements of medical professionalism. Future research however should utilise specific measurements to confirm this finding. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol.13(1): January – June 2012: XX XX.*

Key words: education, medical, undergraduate; education, professional; health promotion; mental health

Introduction

Although at present there is no consensus on the definition of professionalism, one thing is certain; that it is now a crucial element in the training of medical professionals. A rise of reports on doctors with improper conduct endangering patients' lives has necessitated a serious look into the education of doctors at the under and postgraduate levels. There seem to be a positive correlation between disciplinary action as practitioners and previous unprofessional behaviour in medical

school. Hence, leading medical organizations such as the National Board of Medical Examinations in America and the General Medical Council in the United Kingdom along with medical schools all over the world have taken the task of finding ways to effectively train professionalism and standards have been produced as guidance. According to Cruess and Cruess in teaching professionalism students must first know the cognitive base, be provided with opportunities to experience professionalism and reflect on them, have good role models to learn from and are

assessed to further promote what they have learn. Most importantly, according to them, that it is a continuous process that extends beyond the undergraduate and postgraduate years.

Medical Professionalism at Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences

Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences (CUCMS) is a private university college situated in a new city of Cyberjaya, Selangor. It is relatively new, have only been operating since 2005. The university is an institute of higher learning offering courses such as edicine, pharmacy, paramedics as well as traditional and complementary medicine in undergraduate and postgraduate level. There are currently nearly 1000 students attending the university, studying in the different courses.

Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences (CUCMS) believes that the teaching of professionalism should be incorporated into its curriculum. This is reflected by its philosophy and mission statement that can be summarized as follows “...to nurture students to produce doctors who are excellent in aspects of knowledge, skills and attitude”. Professionalism training in CUCMS is known as “Affective Domain” training which runs throughout the 5 years of medical school. It has explicit learning outcomes which are abbreviated by the pneumatic “Just Noble DR CUCMS” (Table 1). Methods in teaching the subject vary from lectures to reflection sessions to camps. New approaches are often sought to improve the effectiveness of the training.

Table 1 CUCMS Affective Domain Learning Outcomes .

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“Just Noble DR CUCMS”
1. To demonstrate the judgment and decision making skill based on the bioethical and medico-legal aspects (Just) .
2. To demonstrate caring, reliability, punctuality and respectfulness (Noble) .
3. To demonstrate the passion and commitment to medicine (Dedicated) .
4. To demonstrate the ability to handle challenges and uncertainties both physically and mentally (Resilient) .
5. To demonstrate competence as empathic communicator – oral & written (Communicative) .
6. To demonstrate the ability to adapt in roles relevant in various fields, conditions and situations (Universal) .
7. To demonstrate altruism in relationships, team and community (Collaborative) .
8. To demonstrate leadership and volunteerism (Managerial) .
9. To demonstrate the understanding of the role of spirituality and cultural sensitivity in public dealing (Spirituality) .

Psychiatry Teaching at Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences

In the fourth year of undergraduate medical training, students go through an 8-weeks attachment in psychiatry where they obtain experience and knowledge in the field through lectures, tutorials as well as ward and clinics exposure. As part of the course, they are required to organize a community project. The objective of the project is mainly to promote awareness of mental health to the general public. However, as years progressed it is felt the exposure to the public at this stage of their studies can be a venue for them to practice professionalism skills that they have learnt and reflect on them. This is in keeping with a standard published by the American Association of Medical Colleges and the

National Board of Medical Examinations which states that it is the obligation of medical schools to provide students with such opportunities so that they can learn from it. As evaluation drives learning, it is also possible to assess them during this event as to further promote the process.

Bahari and Alwi argued that a community project in a clinical posting held during undergraduate medical training like the one organised by fourth year medical students in CUCMS is one such opportunity. The Psychiatry Community Project was thought to provide training in various aspects of professionalism (Figure 1). However, how much do the students, who actually carry out the project agree?

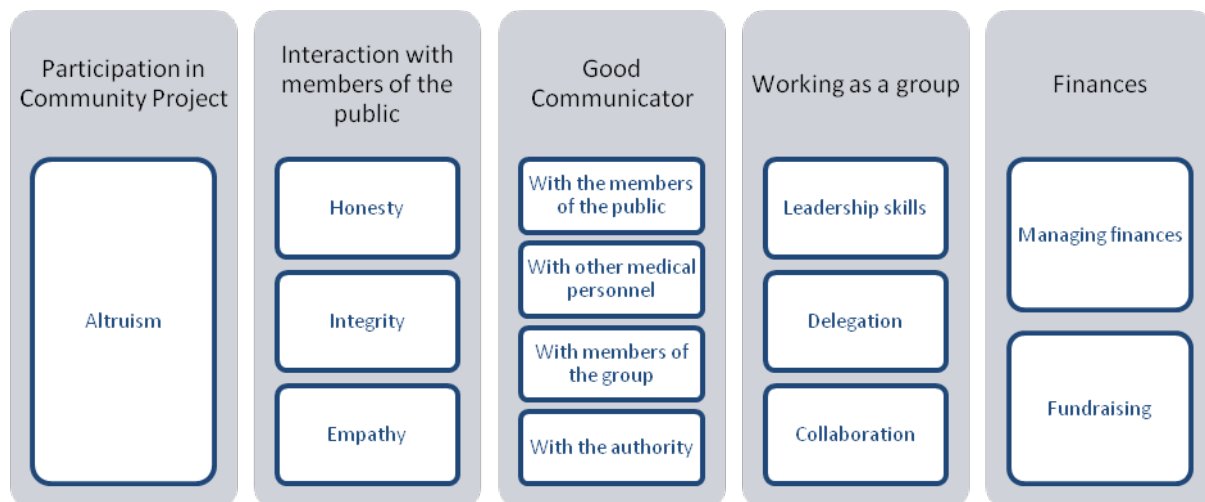


Figure 1. Professional values demonstrated during the planning and execution of the CUCMS Year 4 Community Mental Health Project

In the light of the above statement the objectives of this study are: (i)

to determine the degree of each the professional value as described by the CUCMS Affective Domain outcomes were addressed according to CUCMS medical students who have completed their community project, and (ii)

to explore what professional values as described by the CUCMS Affective Domain

outcomes are best and least dealt with by a community project type of activity.

Methods

This study utilises a mixed method approach. A survey in the form of anonymous self-assessment questionnaire was distributed to two batches of students (n=195) who were year 4 medical students in CUCMS between August 2009 and April 2011. At the time of study the number of students was small, so all

the students who had fulfilled the inclusion criteria were included, except for 14 students who were involved in the pilot for the study. The survey asked the students to what extent do they agree, on a five-point Likert scale, each professional values were addressed during the community project. The values were worded according the CUCMS affective domain learning outcomes as above. On the same survey, students were also asked what professional values were best and least

addressed during the community project. Descriptive statistical analyses using SPSS version 19 were used to describe the findings and qualitative analysis through emerging themes.

Results

From the 195 students given the questionnaire, 90.3% (n=176) completed the questionnaire. 41% (n=80) of the completers were male and 59% (n=115) female aged between 21 and 27.

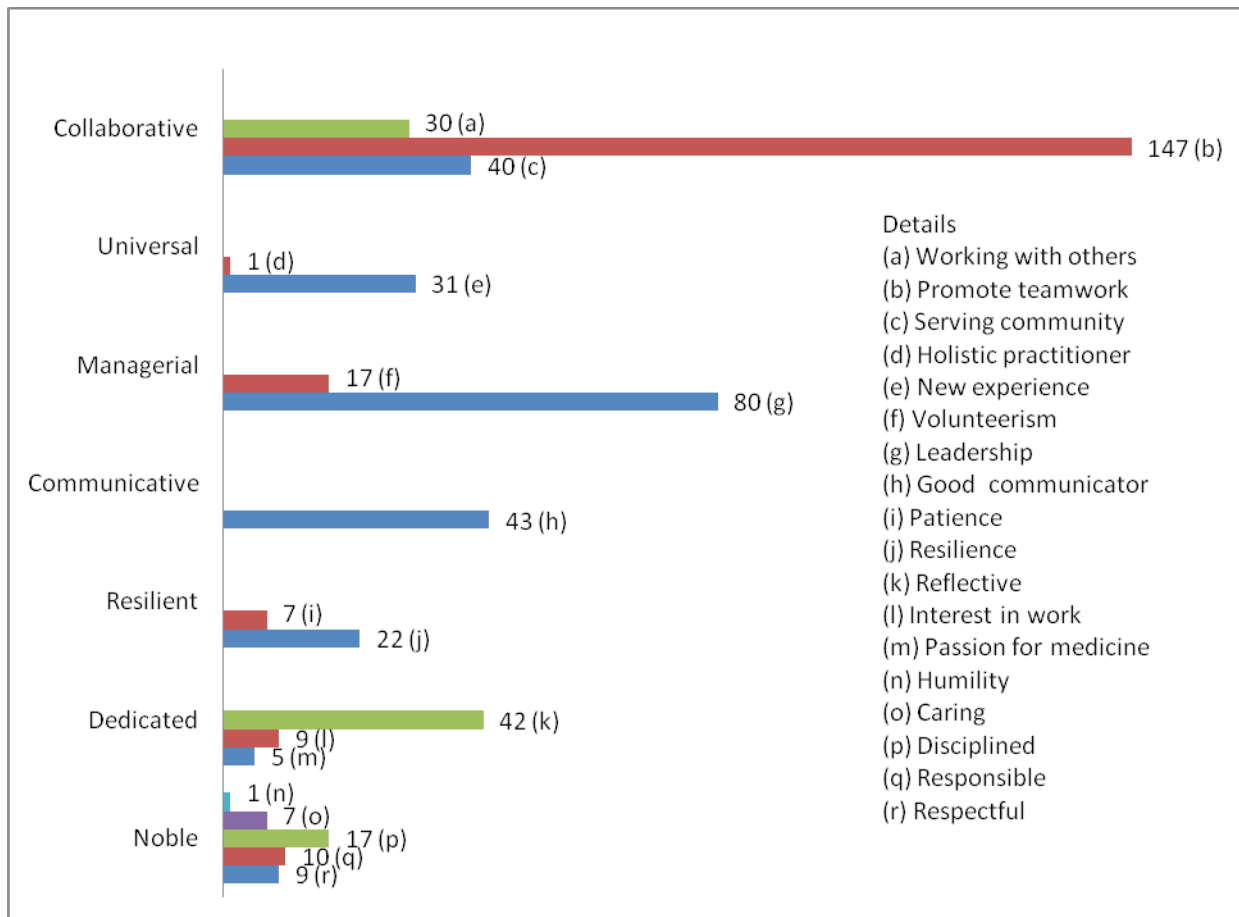


Figure 2: Students' Perspective on Professional Values Best Catered by the Community Mental Health Project.

An overwhelming number of students (n=147) thought that this activity promotes and fosters team working skills. A large number of students (n=80) feels that the community project is a good training ground for

leadership. Many students are of the opinion that being in the community project helps them to develop their verbal and written communication ability (n=43) and a similar number of students views that the activity

encourages them to be more reflective in their daily lives. Thirty students admitted that it is a new experience for them to be mixing with different groups of society and hence taught them how to interact with other people accordingly. On the other hand, only one student each quoted that training to be a holistic practitioner and being humble were well addressed in the activity. Only a handful of students (n=5) stated that being involved in the community project demonstrated their commitment to the field of medicine.

Looking at the themes of professionalism as described by CUCMS Affective Domain Training, in the students' view, the learning outcome best catered by the community project and mental health are "collaborative" and "managerial". However, according to them, the learning outcome most poorly addressed by the project would be "noble".

Discussion

The results indicate that both students and their lecturers in CUCMS concur on utilising the community project during their psychiatry attachment as a venue to train professionalism. It is fascinating from the mixed method approach, what emerges is that the most relevant values to be addressed through this method of teaching and learning are their leadership abilities, volunteerism, team working skills as well as ability to collaborate with other parties.

The large number of participant and the high response rate is a strong point of the study. It may give some insight of medical students' perception on the effectiveness of Psychiatry Community Projects and similar activities in inculcating professionalism. Professionalism is a 'large' construct covering a wide range of definitions. Nevertheless, Brint argued the importance of balancing "expert professionalism" (clinical expertise in the context of medical professionalism) and "social-trustee professionalism" (sense of public and social purposes). This is in line with the American Board of Internal Physicians' (ABIM) insistence that future

physicians should "aspire to altruism, accountability, excellence, duty, service, honour, integrity and respect for others.". To some extent, the findings in this study indicate that one possible way to train professionalism is via involving students in community projects.

Being a survey with no control group, this study is only exploratory in nature. Any conclusion derived from this study is at best preliminary. Future studies should be designed to use instruments that might measure specific elements of professionalism such as that proposed by Veloski and Hojat . This is an interesting strategy considering that a large majority of the respondents thought that training of one of Veloski and Hojat's elements i.e. "teamwork" were covered in the Psychiatry Community Project.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the outcomes of professionalism described by CUCMS are a mixture of affective, communication and social skills. When it was first developed nearly 6 years ago, it was felt that all of the skills were necessary for a good doctor to have and hence how the mnemonic "Just Noble DR CUCMS" came about. As more researches were done and more knowledge unearthed, it is felt that the outcomes may need to be further reviewed and examined. This study is a small effort in trying to improve the delivery and evaluation of our Affective Domain curriculum. Also, it is our small contribution in discovering how professionalism can best be taught in medical schools.

Conclusion

Medical professionalism is a noble construct that signifies the 'respect' and social stature of doctors in the society. Its training however is often *ad hoc* and unstructured. This survey highlights the important role of engaging medical students in community projects such as the Psychiatry Community Project conducted by CUCMS. Feedback from students indicates that this programme is

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useful to train several elements of medical professionalism. Hence, similar programmes should be encouraged to increase the

effectiveness of medical professionalism training.

References

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