

Problem based learning: an effective way to teach in medical school



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Problem based learning (PBL) is a very effective way of teaching which was introduced in the late 1960s. This teaching methodology is a small group teaching which helps to develop knowledge, generic skills and attitudes. Implementation of problem based learning requires some basic changes in the way educators conceive, design, deliver, and assess the curriculum. Problem based learning has been introduced in the medical school curriculum to varying degrees all over the world. In problem based learning, students use “triggers” from the problem case or scenario to define their own learning objectives. Trigger materials includes - paper based clinical scenarios, experimental or clinical laboratory data, photographs, video clips, newspaper articles, all or part of an article from a scientific journal, a real or simulated patient, a family tree showing an inherited disorder. A PBL session usually runs for 3-4 days. Students do independent, self directed study and come back to the group for further discussion. Although there are some ambiguity and controversial opinions to introduce PBL medical curriculum [1]. The million dollar question is how does problem based learning produce better doctors? In this connection a recent systematic review from National University of Singapore can be highlighted. The study included a large population - first year medical graduates to doctors who are practice for up to 20 years. In this study, the level of evidence in favour of problem based learning over traditional learning was derived from previously published data. Scoring system, randomization, sample size, objective assessment – all considered. Findings showed strong potentials of problem based learning. Social dimension showed the strongest evidence in favour of problem based learning. Some points which should influence our thinking regarding PBL was coping with uncertainty (strong), appreciation of legal and ethical aspects of health care (strong), communication skills moderate (self assessed), strong (observed), and self directed learning (moderate). The study concluded with a strong message that, PBL is important for social and cognitive domains [2]. So, PBL can be implemented as mainstay of an entire curriculum or for the delivery of individual courses. Generally, PBL is used as a part of an integrated medical curriculum using a system based approach in most of the medical schools. Problem-



based learning during medical school increases the physician's competency after graduation. So it is strongly recommended to include PBL in the medical curriculum.

Key words

Curriculum, medical school, Problem based learning

Abbreviations

Problem based learning (PBL)

Competing interests

None declared.

References

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