

Editorial

Undergraduate Medical Education in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation



The goal of undergraduate education is to develop attitudes that will enable the student to see the patient holistically and to teach skills for diagnosis and treatment. Currently over specialization is one of the greatest dangers of an integrated medical curriculum because it leads to a tendency to teach medicine as collection of separate, disconnected subjects. It should be remembered, however, that just as the branches of a tree will die if they are cut off from the trunk, so too will the individual medical disciplines if they are not viewed in relation to the holistic needs of the patients. Those instructing undergraduate students should relate their portion of the curriculum to the total needs of patients. Integration of all specialties will enable the student to see the patient as a human being rather than as a summation of systems. Interdepartmental education is sine qua non for good medical education at all levels. To much emphasis on teaching in traditional education system may be detrimental for the learning process. Ideally, the learning process should lead to a modification of the student's manner of thinking and feeling as well as acting. Student's assessment on formative and summative aspects should judge the student's competency and identify strength and weakness. Student feedback should include positive and negative learning experiences.

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation during undergraduate education is important because it is neither necessary nor desirable that all patients who need rehabilitation services be treated by specialists in the field. Patients treated by virtually all of the specialties may need rehabilitation services. Thus undergraduate medical education regarding basic knowledge of rehabilitation will benefit the patients. Ideally the objectives of undergraduate education should be both prevention of disability and rehabilitation.

Every human being should be viewed as an entity connected with his or her environment. This patient and care centered approach used the existing handicap as the starting point and guide for preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic measures. In many medical institutions there is no central focus for rehabilitation medicine and thus there is no guarantee that sufficient attention is paid to the rehabilitative aspects of medicine. Even the evaluation of knowledge and skills in medical rehabilitation is not compulsory in some institute; therefore, this specialty receives insufficient attention during the students' academic programme. Some of the students may have lectures related to rehabilitation medicine but receive insufficient clinical experiences to demonstrate the benefits which patients can achieve from rehabilitation medicine.

Students are already acquainted with history taking, clinical examination and management of patients in the core subject. Only few things are to be added to deal with the disabled patients like functional history, assessment and management. There is definite guideline available for OPD, indoor rehabilitation and theoretical classes in MCI curriculum for PM&R department of this regulation. The MCI has made specific recommendation that PM&R should be taught to medical undergraduates and should be part of the core curriculum.

An undergraduate teaching programme in PMR should allow the student to –

1. Learn about the wider impact of long-term conditions on leisure and work.
2. Become competent at taking a history and performing a relevant clinical examination of disabled people.
3. Understand the principles of treating and managing the disabling effects of long-term conditions, in particular recognizing the role of interdisciplinary team work with other professions (nursing and therapy) and agencies.
4. Develop mature attitudes and behavior towards people with disability and their families.
5. Engender a life-long learning attitude in relation to disabling effects of long-term conditions.

Mandatory internship guideline by MCI should be followed by a universal curriculum. Last but not the least more and more Physiatrists are needed to establish independent PM&R department and teach PMR as mandatory subject in undergraduate curriculum.

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