

Title: Project-based learning for understanding oral precancer

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What problem was addressed: Very high prevalence of tobacco abuse in India results in high prevalence of precancer, making it an important topic in Oral Medicine- one of the subjects in the dental curriculum. Dentists have a significant role in diagnosis, management and prevention of oral precancer, and thus prevent cancer, which would require broader and deeper understanding of this issue of national importance. The traditional lecture method and fragmented teaching of this topic under three different subjects results in learning that is superficial and examination-oriented. Students, thus, do not acquire sufficient 'know-how' to diagnose, manage and prevent occurrence of oral precancer, and are thereby unable to fulfill their expected role in people's health.

What was tried: One of the three basic classes of teaching-learning methods is group learning; with its main advantage being great versatility in enabling achievement of wide range of educational objectives. One of the several group learning techniques, the 'group project' is considered more effective for building deep content understanding, for long-term retention, and with lower-achieving students.

After the entire fourth year class was taught oral precancer the traditional way, a pre-test was conducted. Four experimental groups of 6-7 students each were formed, which were assigned a project, viz. preparation of 'health education' material on oral precancer in the local language of the region where the students would practice after graduation. Two post-tests are planned- one immediately after submission of project to assess broader and deeper understanding, and the other six months later to assess retention of this understanding. Further, subjective perception of students and group facilitators of project-based learning would be obtained through questionnaires.

What lessons were learned: At the time of submission of this abstract, the students were nearing the submission of their project work. Immediately after the submission, the first of the two post-tests would be conducted, and perception feedback obtained. The quantitative and qualitative data generated would be analyzed to draw appropriate conclusions. I expect to present the results of assessment of broader and deeper understanding and perception of students and group facilitators in October during session 3. This section of the abstract would also be updated.