Title: Regular Formative Assessment for Students in Clinical Rotation at School of Medicine, Muhimbili, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Does it Improve Learning?

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Introduction:

Formative assessment is an important aspect of education, but is not in use in our medical school because of concerns about feasibility and potential benefits.

Objectives:

The purpose of the project was to determine whether administering regular formative assessment (FA) for students in clinical rotations is feasible, and improves the learning environment by enhancing interaction between students and teachers.

Methods:

During three 12 week clinical rotations in the 4th year, students were given FA in the form of written comments on weekly essay questions and structured verbal comments on daily clinical case clerking and presentation. Standard summative assessment was maintained. Seminars emphasizing the positive benefits of FA were conducted separately for students and teachers to prepare them for the new intervention. Focus group discussions with teachers and with students were held at the conclusion of the intervention to identify strengths and weaknesses of the FA program. Surveys exploring the learning environment and perceptions and practices of teachers and students were also administered before and after the intervention.

Results:

Students appreciated the change in teachers' attitudes during the FA intervention period, and both students and teachers indicated they wanted FA to become a routine activity for clinical students. Many students felt there was too little interaction between teachers and students in the traditional system for adequate feedback and learning. While many faculty were praised for gentleness and sensitivity, some were felt to be intimidating. Teachers indicated that the raised level of activity during the intervention was acceptable and sustainable.

Conclusions:

Students and faculty see FA as a positive, feasible intervention. The interaction between faculty and students was also enhanced.

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