

Title: Developing a double-degree program for the University of Santo Tomas, Philippines

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Context and setting

Currently, the University of Santo Tomas Faculty of Medicine and Surgery (UST-FMS) offers the MD degree under a traditional but integrated system of instruction. The growing volume of *material medica* has made it increasingly difficult to expect that all information can be given to a medical student within four years of medical school. Consequently, curricular options to learn to be self-directed and life-long learners, a professed product of the problem-based learning (PBL) system, are desirable. However, UST-FMS had a previous experience with implementing a PBL curriculum that failed, so the faculty was not inclined to re-try this educational strategy. However, external conditions fostered change, because of constrained career potential for graduating MDs in the Philippines, with limited opportunity for postgraduate specialization.

Why the idea was necessary

UST-FMS observed gradually deteriorating performance in the local licensure examinations, the exodus of physicians as nurses to other countries, and the possibility that at least two medical schools might begin a combined MD with a Masteral Degree program. UST-FMS, as a premier medical educational institution, decided to pioneer the offering of the double-degree program to provide an alternative career path for medical graduates who decide not to or cannot get into, clinical medical training and practice. Career options would then be broadened to include epidemiology, biostatistics and public or hospital health administration in the Department of Health and/or international agencies such as the WHO.

What is planned to be done

Thirty “volunteer” students from a total population of 400 accepted to the medical course will be invited into the double-degree (MD/MPH) program, provided they also pass the entry requirements for the Masteral program of the Graduate School. They will be accepted using a quota system. The curriculum is designed to be completed within the four year MD curricular period. Basic subjects that are ordinarily offered over two years will all be offered in the freshman year. In the sophomore and junior years, the module or block system covering clinical cases will be conducted using PBL. Because of the introduction of the double-degree, PBL as a teaching strategy is used to free some of the time that students would ordinarily use attending the many lectures under the traditional system education.

Evaluation of results and impact

A randomly selected group of 30 students from the traditional curriculum will be followed, together with the 30 in the new program. The results of their comprehensive summative examinations at the end of the third year, as well as their performance in the written and oral examinations required from graduation will be compared. Eventually, their performance in the licensure examinations will be compared. This program, the first of its kind in the country, will strengthen the image of UST-FMS as a leader in medical education. It will also motivate students

to pursue not only an MD degree but also a Masteral degree that will provide them additional career options as well as enhancing their capacity for self-directed, life-long learning.

An objective comparison can eventually be made of the performance between students who are self-directed and those who are traditionally educated.

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