

## **Introducing clinical skills training to pre-clerkship medical students in a resource constrained medical school.**

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### **Context and setting**

Training of clinical skills to medical students has traditionally been implemented during the clinical clerkships in Uganda. In the year 2003 to 2004, a problem based, student-centered (PBL) medical undergraduate curriculum was introduced with a stated goal of early clinical exposure and training of clinical skills.

### **Why the change was necessary**

Early introduction of clinical skills was viewed to be beneficial since these skills may take significant time to develop. Moreover, early introduction of these skills would likely facilitate the integration of clinical and basic science knowledge. The objectives of the training were to develop competency in communication, history taking, as well as procurement of vital signs.

### **What was done?**

A clinical skills training curriculum was developed through a number of meetings, and consultation workshops with institutional leaders and faculty. At these forums, consensus was reached regarding the objectives, format and content of the curriculum in order to match and maintain relevance between PBL cases and the skills training curriculum.

Initial implementation of the clinical skill training took place in the second semester of 2004. Students in the first and second year received two clinical skills training sessions of two hours each over a period of 15 weeks. First year skills in interpersonal communication and vital signs were taught using mini-lectures, demonstrations and role play. Second year skills covered interpersonal communication and general history taking procedures. Teachers demonstrated skills to students, who in turn performed the procedure on their peers. A ratio of one teacher to 15 students was maintained.

In order to determine the students' perceptions of the program, a questionnaire using a 5 point Likert scale was administered to 32 randomly selected first year students from a population of 100. The teachers' opinion on how to improve the curriculum and their enjoyment of the training were also elicited. Student assessment was not performed in this pilot program, which was used to obtain data for assessment criteria.

### **Evaluation of the results and impact**

All students and teachers indicated that they enjoyed the training sessions. All students surveyed agreed that the clinical skills program was tailored to their knowledge level, that session objectives were clear, and that teachers adequately demonstrated the skills. Students indicated concern about timely feedback, lack of equipment for learning and time for supervised practice. Faculty recommended improvement of the facilities and

recruitment of more faculty to teach the course. This project demonstrated that early training in clinical skills is feasible in resource limited environments. Moreover, training space may be upgraded as a result of the pilot.

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