

Title: Development and evaluation of a medical ethics program for first-year students

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Context and setting: The rapid developments in medical knowledge and technologies, ever increasing demands in health care provision, commercialization of health care policies, complex nature of daily professional life emerge the growing need for medical ethics education. In the General Medical Council 1993 recommendations on undergraduate medical education, implication of “ethics and legal issues relevant to the practice of medicine” as a knowledge objective and “an awareness of the moral and ethical responsibilities involved in individual patient care and in the provision of care to populations of patients” as an attitudinal objective was emphasized. In 1999, the World Medical Association’s 51st General Assembly decided that medical ethics and human rights must be included in the curriculum of all medical schools worldwide. Presently, medical ethics education has universally become an integral part of undergraduate medical curricula.

Why the idea was necessary: Changing circumstances necessitating the education of medical ethics leads to the need for continuous reviewing and improvement of existing implementations of medical ethics education. There is a need for program evaluation studies which are expected to contribute to future curricular developments. In 2009, Dokuz Eylül University School of Medicine initiated an outcome-based curriculum development project and the curricular components of the new educational program, including medical ethics, were being developed. Furthermore, during this process, the idea emerged to evaluate the effectiveness of the medical ethics program for first-year students which is expected to provide valuable data for future improvements.

What was done: The first-year medical ethics program was followed up by the project team consisting of faculties from the departments of medical history & ethics and medical education. Kirkpatrick’s program evaluation level 1 (reaction, i.e. students’ opinions) and level 2 (learning, i.e. students’ knowledge level) were used to evaluate program’s effectiveness. Continuous student feedback was taken at the end of each module and students’ perceptions on the effectiveness on the medical ethics program components were obtained at the end of the academic year via a questionnaire. Students’ achievement levels were evaluated by pre-and post-test.

Evaluation of results and impact: The overall satisfaction level of students on educational activities used in medical ethics education of first-year students was high. In the evaluation of program’s effectiveness, the item with the highest score was student ratings on the role of educators. The program was perceived as most effective for identifying and describing ethical issues. Currently student assessment is carried out through book reading assignment, but most of the students preferred interviews with standardized patients and multiple choice questions instead. The comparison of pre-test and post-test results showed that the highest increase was achieved in being aware of appropriate approaches to ethical issues in patient-physician relationships (i.e. privacy) and ethical principles in physician-media interactions objectives.

In the light of the data obtained, increasing ethical components in PBL scenarios, improving faculty involvement in certain educational activities (book reading assignments) and covering multiple choice questions pertaining to medical ethics in the first-year theoretical exams were considered beneficial for further improvement of the first-year's program.