



Introduction Of A Module In Communication Skills To Post Graduate Students

Dr. Ruby Singh^{1*}, Rinchu Loomba²

¹Associate Professor, Department of Paediatrics, Christian Medical College & Hospital Ludhiana (Pb)

²Professor & Head, Department of Biochemistry, Christian Medical College & Hospital, India.

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Ruby Singh,

*Associate Professor, Department of Paediatrics, CMC & Hospital, Ludhiana-141008 Punjab, India.

Email: rubyranadive@yahoo.com

Citation: Dr. Ruby Singh, et al (2024), Introduction Of A Module In Communication Skills To Post Graduate Students, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(7), 297-301

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i7.6661

ARTICLE INFO

Received Date: 21/06/2024

Acceptance Date: 2/07/2024

ABSTRACT

Background: Objective: To develop and implement a module on communication skills and evaluate its feasibility and usefulness among post graduate students.

Methodology: It was a prospective study and all post graduate students in the department of paediatrics were enrolled after taking informed consent. Communication skills module was designed and validated. One day workshop was conducted which included video sessions, role-plays, lectures and small group discussion. A retro-pre questionnaire was used to assess the difference in the knowledge and attitude towards communication skill using Communication Skill Attitude Scale (CSAS). Feedback from faculty and postgraduates was obtained through a 5-point Likert scale feedback questionnaire.

Results: 'Good communication skills are important for being a good doctor' showed a rise from 79% 'Neutral' to 'Agree' 89.4% post workshop. 'Learning communication skills was interesting and helped to respect the patients' showed a rise to 'strongly agree'. On Likert scale 'Good communication skills is not needed to be a good doctors' showed a change in 'disagree' from 10% to 84.2%. Though 79% of the participants 'Strongly agree' that the workshop was clear in its aim and objectives, 26.3% 'disagreed' that it was adequate. The overall quality of training program were rated 'Good' 63.25%, Excellent 21% and 'Very Good' by 15.8%. Approximately 85% of participants and faculty wanted the module to be a part of the curriculum. Role play was voted as the best session.

Conclusion: Communication skills should be taught to the post graduates with inclusion of communication skills module in their teaching curriculum.

Keywords: Communication skills module, feasibility, acceptability, post graduate students

Introduction

It is observed that though post-graduate students during their training period are being made proficient in knowledge and skills, they lack the ability to interact well with the patients, especially during stress and crisis. This results in uncomfortable and at times unpleasant patient-doctor interaction^[1]. Post-graduates are usually pressed for time with tight duty schedule. Long hectic nights with food and sleep deprivation are other significant factors which contribute to poor communication and lack of empathy.^[2] Post graduates need to be sensitised to the need for appropriate communication and also try to use it in their day-to-day dealing with patients as well as colleagues thereby making the interactions more comfortable. Patients will also develop trust in the doctors thereby improving doctor-patient relationship.^[3,4] Communication skills and

professionalism are of huge importance in medical practice as in all other service-providing industries.^[5] Effective communication is the core of a good doctor-patient relationship. Since the present post graduate curriculum does not include teaching and assessment of communication skills, there is patient dissatisfaction and poor trust, conflicts and ultimately compromised health care.^[6] Teaching correct method of communication and professionalism towards patients to post graduate students, especially in special circumstances, will also help avoid 'code purple' and medical lawsuits in long run.

Aim & objectives: Present study was conducted with the aim to introduce a module in communication skills to post graduate students and to evaluate the feasibility and usefulness of the module.

Material And Method

This was a prospective interventional study done in the department of Pediatrics of Christian Medical College and Hospital, Ludhiana. This study was done as an academic project of Advance Course in Medical Education. All post graduate students in the department between April'2022 and Sept'2022 were included in the study. Requisite permission from the college Principal, the Head of Pediatrics, Medical Education Unit department, Institutional research committee and Institutional Ethics committee was obtained. A module on communication skills was designed and validated. The department faculty was sensitised regarding the project and informed consent of the participants was taken. The post graduate students were divided into batches of 8 for each workshop as per their availability and convenience of the department. A one-day workshop was planned and conducted which included videos sessions, role-plays, lectures and small group discussions. Each workshop was conducted on a different scenario pertaining to 'communication' using the Calgary-Cambridge Guide. A retro-pre questionnaire was given to all participants to assess the difference in their pre-existing and post workshop knowledge and attitude towards communication skill using Communication Skill Attitude Scale (CSAS). Feedback of the workshop from faculty and postgraduates in the department to the program was obtained through a 5-point Likert scale feedback questionnaire.

Results and Observations

In this study 35.7% of post graduates were final years and 32.1% in first and second years each. Out of the total participants, 21.4% were males and 78.6% were females. Most of the post graduates (78.9%) could communicate in local language whereas the remaining could not speak local language at all or to some extent. Though 79% of the participants 'Strongly agree' that the workshop was clear in its aim and objectives, however 26.3% 'disagreed' that it was adequate. Majority of the participants 'strongly agreed' that the workshop was well planned and interesting with relevant content. The overall quality of training program were rated 'Good' (63.25), Excellent 21% and 'Very Good' (15.8%) by the post graduates. 84.2% of participants chose 'most likely' as an answer to recommendation of these sessions to colleagues and other departments. 73.7% were 'very poor' about their awareness regarding communication skills before the workshop. Awareness increased to 'very good' (84.2%) after the workshop. 84.2% of participants wanted the module to be a part of the curriculum whereas 15.8% were still unsure. 58% of the participants felt that language was the most common barrier of communication with 'breaking bad news'/ Limited time/ privacy issue and safety issues accounting for 10.5% each. 'Role play' was appreciated by all (100%) as their 'WOW moment' and 42.1% also voted for video demonstration. 89.5% wanted more role plays and 10.5 % wanted more sessions to be conducted during the workshop. 69.8% of the faculty rated the sessions to be 'useful' and 25% as 'extremely useful'. 73.6% of the participants rated 'Extremely useful.' About 88% of them wanted the module to be a part of the curriculum and 12% were in favour of utilising the module on a need-based basis.

In Retro-pre questionnaire (Fig 1), approximately 79% of the participants were neutral pre-workshop towards the question of good communication skills are important for being a good doctor. This changed significantly to 89.5% post workshop. Developing communication skills is as important as having the knowledge of medicine was significantly increased to 89.4% post workshop from 36.8% pre- workshop. 52.6% of participants did not see the point in learning communications skills and 78.9% believed that nobody would fail for having poor communication skills. Post workshop (Fig 3) 84.9% and 68.4% participants strongly disagreed to the above statements. Pre-workshop (Fig 2) approximately 50% and 79% of participants said that they do not have time to learn communication skills or wouldn't be bothered to attend sessions on communication skills. Post workshop 84.2% and 78.9% strongly disagreed to it. Learning communication skills is interesting and will help to respect the patients showed significant rise from 'neutral' to 'strongly agree' on Likert scale post workshop. Learning communication skills helped facilitate teamwork skills along with the ability to communicate with patients. Most of the participants who gave a 'neutral' response to this question pre workshop, either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' post workshop. Pre workshop, majority of the participants (63%) agreed that they did not want to share their communication problems with anyone and 26.3% found hard to admit having some problems with communication. Post workshop the participants disagreed to the above statement and agreed to share their problems in communicating with patients and colleagues.

73.6% of post graduates were 'neutral' to the question on difficulty in trusting information on communication skills by non clinical lectures prior to the workshop. Almost the same percentage of post graduates disagreed

to the given question post workshop. 94.7% of the participants 'disagreed' to the question that Communication skills teaching would have a better image if it sounded more like a science subject after the workshop. Though 52.6% of the participants 'strongly agree' that learning communication skill was fun, only 37% 'agreed' that it was easy. Only 10% of participants 'disagreed' to the question that good communication skills is not needed to be a good doctors before the workshop. This figure changed significantly to 84.2% post workshop. Only 5.3% of the participant's pre workshop agreed to the question that it is useful to learn communication skills in medical degree. This was drastically increased to 84.2% after the workshop. Learning communication skills was applicable to learning medicine. Percentage of the participants who 'agree' to it rose from 10% prior to the workshop to 94.7% post workshop. Majority of the post graduates (84.2%) were not sure about the ability to pass exams will get them through medical school rather than their ability to communicate. Post workshop more than half (52.4%) 'Strongly disagreed' to the fact stated.

To the questions of learning communication skills has helped or will help them respect our colleagues and recognise the patients' rights regarding confidentiality and informed consent, 73.6% 'agreed' pre workshop. Post workshop, 52.6% and 16% 'strongly agreed' to the said questions respectively. Prior to the workshop, 57.9% 'agreed' that learning communication skills is important because ability to communicate is a lifelong skill. In Post workshop 73.6% 'strongly agreed' to the question.

Discussion

Effective communication is the core of a good doctor-patient relationship.^[6] The post-graduate students during their training years in their respective departments were being made proficient in knowledge and skills but they lacked the ability to interact well with the patients, especially during times of stress and crisis. This made patient-doctor interaction very uncomfortable and unpleasant in some instances.^[1] The present study was undertaken with the aim to introduce a module in communication skills to post graduate students in the Department of Pediatrics of a tertiary care hospital. All the responses were recorded on Likert scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. A significant difference was noted in the pre and post workshop percentages on the questions related to the need of learning communication skills. In this study it was observed that 52.6% were 'neutral' and 84.2% 'Strongly Disagreed' to the pre and post workshop respectively, on the question on the need to learn communication skills. It was noted that pre workshop 78.9% of the participants agreed that nobody is going to fail his/her medical degree for having poor communication skills. 68.4% 'Disagreed after the workshop. Post graduates need to be sensitised to the need for appropriate communication and also try to use it in their day-to-day dealing with patients as well as colleagues thereby making the interactions more comfortable. Patients will also develop trust in the doctors thereby improving doctor-patient relationship.^[3,4] In the retro-pre questionnaire, questions such as 'Learning communication skills has helped or will help me respect patients / Learning communication skills has helped or will help facilitate my team-work skills/ Learning communication skills has improved my ability to communicate with patients'; majority of the responses were 'Neutral pre workshop (94.7%, 84.2% and 78.9% respectively). These percentages improved to 78.9% ,63.1% and 84.2% 'Agree', after the workshop respectively. To the question 'My ability to pass exams will get me through medical school rather than my ability to communicate' 84.2% were 'Neutral' prior to the workshop which showed an improvement of 52.6% 'Strongly Disagree' after the workshop. Communication skills and professionalism are of huge importance in medical practice as in all other service-providing industries.^[5] In this study it was observed that to questions 'Learning communication skills is interesting, Learning communication skills is fun and easy and I think its really useful to learn communication skills in medical degree' there was a shift towards 'Strongly Agree' of 73.6%, 52.6% and 84.2% respectively. Although teaching skills are considered critical to communication skills teaching, experts have identified two other factors that may potentially help clinical teachers identify and make use of relevant teaching moments in clinical practice: 1) to agree about what is important to teach and 2) to develop teachers' ability to recognise good, poor or mistakenly omitted skill performance. Knowing which communication skills to use or avoid in which contexts and being able to recognise skills in trainee-patient encounters seem to be two key factors for successful clinical teaching.^[11] In response to the question 'After I was accepted and enrolled in medical school, I thought it was a really good idea to learn communication skills', about 79% 'Agree' and 21% 'strongly agree' to the statement. 63% of the participants 'Disagree' post workshop to the question 'Communication skills learning should be left to psychology students, not medical students'.

Conclusion

Communication skills is lifelong skill that not only helps in the field of medicine but also routinely in our day to day dealing with people. It was well accepted by majority of the students and faculty that teaching communication skills to post graduate students should be included in the Post graduate teaching curriculum with focus on communication skills during special situations such as; breaking a bad news. Privacy issues and safety of the post graduates during interaction with patient or patient relatives should be prioritised.

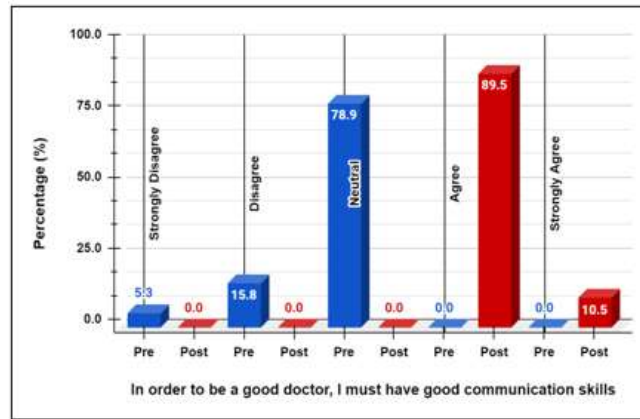


Figure 1: Retro-pre-questionnaire.

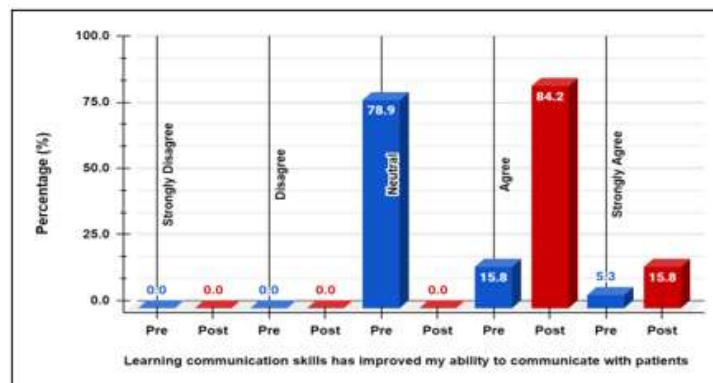


Figure 2: Pre-workshop responses.

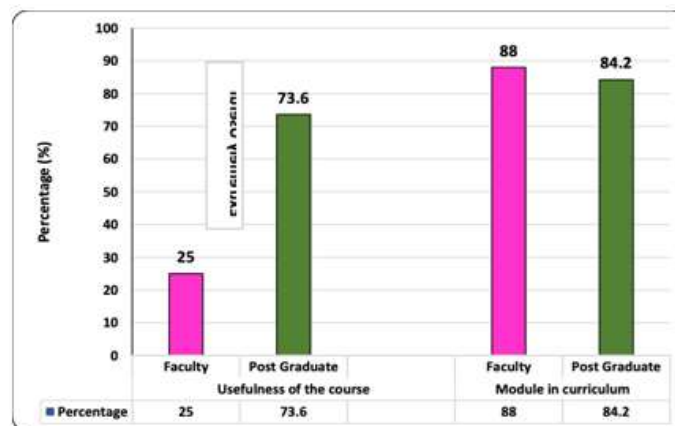


Figure 3: Post-workshop responses

References

1. Ranjan P, Kumari A, Chakrawarty A. How can doctors improve their communication skills? *Jr of Clinical and Diagnostic Research* 2015; 9(3): JE 01- JE 04.
2. Chaudhary A, Gupta V. Teaching Communication skills to medical students: Introducing the fine art of medical practise. *Int J Apple Basic Med Res*, 2015; 5 (Suppl 1): S41-S44.
3. Faye A, Kalra G., Swamy R. Shukla A, Subramanyam A, Kamath R. Study of emotional intelligence and empathy in medical post graduates. *In.Jr. of Psychiatry*; 2011; 53 (2):140-44.
4. Bhagat, Purvir R, Prajapati, Bhatt RB, Prajapati VK, Dureja R, Tank GP. Development and introduction of a communication skills modulator to post graduates students of ophthalmology. *Indian Jr. of Ophthalmology* 2019; 67 (11): 1810- 15.
5. Tadjer H, Lafifi Y, Derindere M, Gulsecen S, Bouchelaghem HS. What are the social skills of students in higher education? Conference: Future-learning 2018. 7th International conference on Innovations in learning for the future '2018: Digital transformation in education.
6. Rees C, Sheard C. The relationship between medical students' attitude towards communication skills learning and their demographic and education-related characteristics. *Med Educ* 2002; 36: 1017- 27.

7. Nayak RK, Kadeangadi.D. Effect of teaching communication skills to medical undergraduate students: An exploratory study. *Indian Jr of Community and Family Medicine* 2019; 5(2): 108-113.
8. Faculty of Medicine. Communication Skills Pocket Cards- Continuing Professional Development and Medical Education, Dalhousie University; Division of Medical Education, Communication Skills Program csp.medicine.dal.ca (902) 494-6307.
9. Selma Güleç. The analysis of the concept of empathy skills in post graduate social studies thesis. *International Educational studies* 2020; 13 (5): 1913-9020
10. Yakhforosha A, Shirazi M, Yousefzeh N et al. Psychometric properties of the communication skills attitude scale (CSAS) measure in a sample of Iranian medical students. *J Adv Med Educ Prof* 2018; 6(1):14-21
11. Junod Perron, N., Nendaz, M., Louis-Simonet, M. *et al.* Impact of postgraduate training on communication skills teaching: a controlled study. *BMC Med Educ* 2014; 14, 80. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-14-80>.