

# **Comparison of selected health risk behaviours and attitudes between newly entered and fourth year students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in 2010**

**I.H.D.S.Prabath, P.Piranavan, K.J.S.Pinsiri**  
*Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo*

## **Introduction**

Medical students are the doctors of the future, who will be considered as role models. Only with proper guidance for lifestyle modifications, can society overcome the currently rising burden of non communicable diseases. To deliver proper guidance, doctors themselves should be free of health risk behaviors and attitudes. Therefore it is worth measuring the prevalence of health risk behaviors among medical students and how it evolves during the course of medical education.

## **Objectives**

To compare selected health risk behaviours and attitudes between newly entered and fourth year students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in 2010

## **Methods**

391 students participated in this descriptive cross sectional study representing newly entered and fourth year medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in the year 2010. All the students in the targeted population were studied other than the non respondents. A self administered questionnaire on selected health risk behaviours and attitudes was used. Socio demographic data, selected health risk habits (physical activity, dietary habits, smoking, alcohol intake) and attitudes on individual health risk habits were analyzed using chi square test and odds ratio.

## **Results**

The study population consisted of a diversity of students belonging to different ethnicities, different religions and family income. The total prevalence of smoking (newly entered 2.1% vs fourth year 5.9%) and alcohol intake (newly entered 7% vs fourth year 16.2%) was low. Significant differences were observed in skipping of a meal ( $\chi^2=25.416$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<0.05$  and  $OR=0.311$ ; 95% CI 0.196-0.495), alcohol intake ( $\chi^2=7.998$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<0.05$  and  $OR=0.387$ ; 95% CI 0.197-0.761) and smoking ( $\chi^2=4.840$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<0.05$  and  $OR=0.261$ ; 95% CI 0.072-0.939) among newly entered and fourth year medical students.

## **Conclusions**

Between newly entered and fourth year medical students of Colombo Medical Faculty in 2010, statistically significant differences were found on the prevalence of smoking, alcohol, skipping meals and responses to some of the attitude questions. Our findings suggest the importance of considering interventions focused on promoting healthy student lifestyles within the medical school and the necessity for further studies in this area in order to plan successful interventions.