

OP-26: Medical students' view on the curriculum: a comparison of two student batches

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Introduction: Perceptions of a medical undergraduate reflect the effectiveness of the programme offered. Teaching at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo is carried out in five parallel “streams” which run longitudinally throughout the course, namely Basic Sciences, Applied Sciences, Community, Behavioural Sciences and Clinical Sciences Streams. Clinical education is carried out in a dynamic teaching environment which underwent several changes including the expansion of e-learning platforms, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The two consecutive student batches (2013-A/L and 2014-A/L) surveyed in this study, faced the final year examination one year apart. 2013 AL batch had to carryout learning amidst COVID-19 from January 2020 to March 2021 during their final year and the 2014 batch had to carryout learning amidst COVID-19 from January 2020 to March 2022 which included their fourth year and final year learning. During this period, online learning was introduced in the place of onsite lectures. The aim of this study was to assess the perceptions of new graduates on the academic programme amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: A purpose designed self-administered questionnaire based on several themes including the curriculum amidst the pandemic was administered at the end of the final year examination for both 2013-A/L and 2014-A/L batches of students, including 192 students and 198 students respectively who had undergone the same curriculum.

Results: A total of 289 responded. The overall perception regarding the curriculum was that learning outcomes, teaching activities and examinations matched appropriately. More focus on clinically relevant subject matter was suggested. The 2014-A/L batch noted a considerable effect from the COVID-19 pandemic during the final year clinical training. This was mostly due to reduced clinical exposure. Compared to the 2013-A/L batch, 2014-A/L batch appreciated e-learning as a more convenient mode of learning, especially during the pandemic.

Conclusions: The analysis showed that both batches emphasise on paying special attention to clinically relevant subject matter. As the junior batch has appreciated e-learning more, it is apparent that although e-learning was incorporated incidentally during the pandemic, it could be the new way forward in medical education as students get more accustomed to it.

Keywords: graduate perception, curriculum, COVID-19