

Practical methods for teaching safe prescribing to final-year medical students in preparation for foundation training

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Aims

Safe prescribing is an essential skill for final-year medical students becoming newly qualified doctors. It is also an area for which students often feel they are not prepared during medical school. The aim of our study is to demonstrate the value of an interactive small-group teaching session on safe prescribing to help prepare students for their careers as newly qualified foundation doctors and ultimately promoting patient safety.

Methods

The teaching session consisted of several groups of six to eight students working on a workbook of case scenarios. The learning objectives were stated at the beginning and were directly linked to the prescribing section of the Foundation Programme curriculum. The workbook included common clinical scenarios that they would be likely to encounter during their careers as foundation doctors. They were also provided with British National Formulary (BNF) books and 'mock' drug charts to practise prescribing on. They were also provided with a drug chart containing common errors, such as using generic drug names or incorrect units, which they had to review and correct. They were initially encouraged to work individually and then collaboratively as a group to discuss answers and challenges. They were given the opportunity to discuss any questions with the tutors throughout the session and a formal feedback session was set at the end of the session.

Results

Overall, the students found the teaching session to be very helpful in adding to their knowledge and skills in safe prescribing. They reported that the use of 'real-life' case scenarios and ability to practise on drug charts were important practically and would prepare them for their jobs as foundation doctors. The majority of students, 71%, reported that the teaching sessions made them feel more prepared for starting foundation training. The free-text comments revealed that students found the clinical scenarios extremely useful and more relevant than traditional, didactic lectures. They also emphasised the benefits of using drug charts to practise prescribing on and the emphasis on safe prescribing and the ability to identify common errors. Areas of development from

the feedback included providing additional questions to take home and including more complex questions aimed at a higher level.

Conclusions

We have demonstrated the value of small-group sessions in delivering teaching on safe prescribing in preparation for foundation training in the UK. Students particularly found the use of authentic clinical scenarios and drug charts very helpful in preparing them for 'real-life' working as foundation doctors. The emphasis on practising safe prescribing and ultimately ensuring patient safety was central to the teaching session. The alignment of the learning objectives with the content of the teaching and the Foundation Programme curriculum helped to motivate and engage the students. We propose the use of practical small-group teaching sessions as an effective method of delivering teaching on safe prescribing to final-year medical students in preparation for foundation training. ■

Conflict of interest statement

The students were charged £10 to attend the voluntary teaching course. This was used to cover the printing costs and the remaining profit was donated to a UK charity, Hand in Hand for Syria.

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