

‘Mind the gap’: a student-led informal curriculum to enhance professional practice

Authors: Will P Ries,^{A,B} Binay Gurung^{A,C} and Nick Manning-Cork^{A,D}

Aims

To deliver a student-designed programme targeting the gap between medical education outcomes and challenges confronting professionals in practice – better aligning with projected global needs – and to evaluate its impact amid formal undergraduate structures.

Methods

In 2015, the board of a major UK provider of medical continuing professional development (CPD) approved the launch of a student-led academic division to address proposed deficits in formal curricula. Eighty-two undergraduate representatives from 28 medical schools were recruited to identify prevalent professional challenges where additional knowledge and skills could support graduates in their future practice. Four domains were prioritised: leadership and management, teamwork, teaching and engagement with policy-making.

An annual programme was designed, commissioned and coordinated by medical students. Each component varied in scale and scope, from an initiative equipping students to draft and influence education policy to a conference signposting towards clinical leadership roles. All aligned to at least one of the four domains, either in content or by process (eg by appointing students to deliver small-group teaching). Demand for – and impact of – the programme was assessed via mixed methods, monitoring attendance, ratings on a Likert scale and free-text feedback. Data were anonymised by the hosting CPD institution before release to the student programme directors.

Results

From 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2017, 1,299 delegates from the UK and Ireland attended 17 education meetings. Among feedback submitted, 89% professed enhanced expertise in at least one of the four domains. Seventy-one percent rated content as ‘highly relevant’ in advancing their medical education. The policy initiative was particularly well-received, both by attendees and the external

medical community. Ninety-six per cent of delegates declared a *de novo* aspiration to contribute to policy-making in the future. Extracts from the resulting report, published in the *Lancet*, were cited in Sir Robert Francis QC’s enquiry into NHS workforce culture, following which our proposal for mandatory training in raising patient safety concerns was adopted as a regulated standard for health professionals’ curricula.

Conclusion

Failures in healthcare organisations are commonly ascribed to deficits in leadership, communication, systems and processes and staff disempowerment, and rarely to those of clinical knowledge. This national programme proved deliverable, positively-received and was felt by attendees to have mitigated such gaps. Medical students are keen and competent participants in leadership, teamwork, teaching and policy training. We encourage adoption in formal education settings, and commit to ongoing student-led horizon scanning for emerging curricular innovations that track evolving health system needs, better equipping tomorrow’s professionals. ■

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare their interests, as three successive chairs of the education programme described.

Authors: ^ARoyal Society of Medicine, London; ^BUniversity of Birmingham, Birmingham; ^CUniversity of Leicester, Leicester; ^DEast Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, Margate, UK