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Editorial

Peer assessment: An effective tool to modify professional behaviour of undergraduate medical students

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1. Introduction

Health professionals must work with integrity, treat patients and colleagues with respect.^{1,2} Peer assessment can be an important way for ensuring these qualities in undergraduate medical students. CBME (Competency based Medical Education) curriculum in India emphasizes on attitudes, ethics, and communication skills as a part of the teaching curriculum throughout MBBS course.² Various innovative methods are being used for assessment of these attributes for their effective implementation.^{3–5}

Peer assessment can be used as an assessment tool of work habits, behaviour and interaction of students with other undergraduate students.⁶ This will improve their capacity of building relationship in an appropriate manner. In the first phase of MBBS, the students while, collaboratively working in small groups in dissection hall and microanatomy laboratories of anatomy, laboratories of physiology and biochemistry get ample opportunities to interact with each other. They develop interpersonal skills and gain knowledge about importance of discussions in teaching learning and modulation of behaviour and thinking by such interactions. In this situation, opinion of their peers become more acceptable and valuable to them. This helps them in identifying areas for improvement.

It is documented that peer assessment at an early stage is helpful for betterment of work habits and interpersonal attributes.⁷ The peer assessment can be repeatedly administered and assessed for its association with academic performance.

2. Preparation Phase of Peer Assessment

Before starting the process, an interactive workshop can be organised, in which the students can be introduced to the assessment process, method of giving effective and constructive feedback and peer assessment proforma (PAP).⁸ Assignment of peer raters can be done by administering some customised or validated PAP available as such for example, 'Rochester Peer Assessment Tool' (RPAT). Every student can be evaluated by 5-6 peers and each student can give feedback to his or her peers.⁷ This peer assessment process is widely being used in many places such as Cleveland and Rochester⁸ for holistic improvement of students. These feedback proformas generally consist of standardized 5 Likert scale items which are categorized into: work habit, interpersonal attribute and global items. Incorporation of open ended questions in the proforma may further add more attributes in the assessment.

In nutshell, peer evaluation may be included as a part of the behavioral assessment of students. It will not only be testing affective domain and interpersonal skills but, prove to be an effective tool for helping students improve

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their behavioural skill through constructive feedback. This process may aid in developing a realistic understanding of their own and their colleagues' professional conduct. Further research is required to test the role of peer assessment in modifying professional behaviour of students.

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