

A Cross-Sectional Study on Students' Feedback on the Introduction of Foundation Course in the MBBS Programme in a Government Run Medical College of West Bengal

Ujjwal Bandyopadhyay¹, Koushik Ghosh², Rajdeep Saha³

¹ Department of Pathology and MEU Coordinator, Raiganj Government Medical College and Hospital, Raiganj, West Bengal, India. ² Department of Physiology and MEU Coordinator, Raiganj Government Medical College and Hospital, Raiganj, West Bengal, India. ³ Department of Microbiology, Coordinator, Raiganj Government Medical College and Hospital, Raiganj, West Bengal, India.

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Medical students in India come from diverse cultural, linguistic, economic and social backgrounds. Further, students from similar backgrounds are often found to have obtained their school education from different educational boards. Thus, to ensure a smooth initiation of these diverse population of high school graduates to the challenging medical science curriculum, a foundation course at the beginning of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme was considered to be of utmost importance. General guidelines for this 'Foundation Course' were laid down and all institutions were expected to abide by them but provisions were allowed to institutions to make local changes depending on the context and requirements. We wanted to analyse the feedback from the students regarding the foundation course.

METHODS

A pre-validated questionnaire-based, cross-sectional study was carried out among MBBS students in our institution. The study was conducted in the month of November 2019 after obtaining the institutional ethics committee clearance.

RESULTS

Most of the students agreed (a total of 86 out of 96 students) with the comment that the course fulfilled the objectives set out in the foundation course brochure. 52.08 % students agreed and 29.16 % students strongly agreed that the course satisfied their need and expectations. 88 out of 96 students agreed that there was opportunity for feedback and evaluation which in turn gives the scope to introduce formative assessment in the course. This constituted the best part in our learning experience.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, majority of the students' feedback on the foundation course was in an affirmative note. Most of them felt that the course was well structured and informative enough for them to apply the newly learnt lessons to cope with some of their real-life problems. Their positive feedback as well as the relevant suggestions they submitted will obviously contribute towards encouraging the involved faculties as well as the institute to execute the foundation course in a more user-friendly and structured manner in the future years to come.

KEYWORDS

Foundation Course, Feedback, MBBS

Corresponding Author:

*Dr. Koushik Ghosh,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Physiology,
Raiganj Government Medical College
and Hospital, Raiganj, Uttar
Dinajpur - 733134, West Bengal, India.
E-mail: drkoushik78@gmail.com*

DOI: 10.18410/jebmh/2021/237

How to Cite This Article:

Bandyopadhyay U, Ghosh K, Saha R. A cross-sectional study on students' feedback on the introduction of foundation course in the MBBS programme in a government run medical college of West Bengal. J Evid Based Med Healthc 2021;8(18):1236-1240. DOI: 10.18410/jebmh/2021/237

Submission 09-01-2021,

Peer Review 15-01-2021,

Acceptance 12-03-2021,

Published 03-05-2021.

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BACKGROUND

India has the unique distinction of having the largest number of medical schools. The MBBS programme is the foundation of the health delivery system of the country creating health care professionals. As because the very essence of India is "Unity in diversity", medical students in India come from diverse cultural, linguistic, economic and social backgrounds. Further, students from similar backgrounds are often found to have obtained their school education from different educational boards. The MBBS course is a highly challenging program which prepares the student for a lifetime of altruistic care, continued learning, discipline, professional and ethical behaviour, and respect for human interactions.¹

It is therefore necessary that a smooth transition of high school students to this challenging learning system is ensured. To achieve this aim, a foundation course at the beginning of MBBS programme is considered as the need of the hour.² Furthermore this Foundation course is the fore runner to the role out of competency based undergraduate curriculum across the country under the aegis of the erstwhile Medical Council of India and the Board of Governors.³

The objective of the foundation course of one-month duration at the beginning of the MBBS course is that, it will sensitise the fresh medical student with the required knowledge and skills that will assist him / her in acclimatising to the new professional environment which would be his / her milieu for a life-long career in the medical profession.^{2,3}

While the institutions are expected to abide by the general guidelines about foundation course, local changes can be made depending on the context and requirements.²

The Objectives of Foundation Course are to:²

- (1) *Orient the newly enrolled medical graduate students to:*
 - a) Medical science as a profession as well as make them aware of the social role of a physician.
 - b) The MBBS curriculum.
 - c) The History of modern medicine and the different alternate health systems prevalent in the country.
 - d) Professionalism, attitude and concept of medical ethics.
 - e) The health care delivery machinery of our country.
 - f) Priorities of our nation on the health front and the different policies to realize those priorities.
 - g) Concept of immunisation and universal precautions.
 - h) Concept of biohazard and techniques to ensure patient as well as personal safety.
 - i) Principles of primary health care, both general and community-based care.
 - j) The academic environment.
- (2) *Enable the learner to acquire enhanced skills in:*
 - a) Language, both written and verbal;
 - b) Interpersonal relationships;
 - c) Communication;
 - d) Learning, with special emphasis on self-directed learning;

- e) Time management;
- f) Stress management;
- g) Information technology usage.

(3) *Train the learner to provide*

- a) First-aid;
- b) Basic life support.

(4) *Field visit to community and primary health centre:*

Visits to the CHC and PHC is aimed to provide orientation to the learner about health care delivery methods through these centres and also enable them to interact with health care workers, patients and their families.

(5) *Professional development including ethics:*

The learner would be introduced to the concept of Ethics and Professionalism.

(6) *Sports and extracurricular activities:*

The sports and extracurricular activities have been given a compulsory time slot of 22 hours in the one month of the Foundation course to emphasise it to the learners that it is important to balance work and life's other needs even when one is practising an art as demanding as medical science. Also, it provides the opportunity for the learners to have some physical activity and break from any mundaneness that may creep in during the course.

(7) *Enhancement of language / computer skills / learning skills:*

These sessions have been incorporated in the course to help the learners possessing different abilities in terms of language skills and oratory competence to undergo training to improve their English speaking and writing abilities. Also, learners hailing from places foreign to the locality will get an opportunity to have some basic ideas regarding the local spoken language. Lastly basic computer skills are essential in any course and so the sessions are planned to impart them to the learners for their future needs.

Objectives

- Obtain the feedback from the newly enrolled MBBS students regarding the Foundation course.
- Analyse the feedback thus obtained in terms of students' acceptance (Likert scale score).
- Formulate pertinent revisions to be made during the designing of the course for the subsequent batches. This in turn will make the foundation course more acceptable to the students as well as contribute towards creating an ambience of innovation among the faculties of the institution.

METHODS

A pre validated questionnaire-based, descriptive, cross-sectional study was carried out among MBBS students in our institution.

Inclusion Criteria

All newly enrolled first year MBBS students (batch 2019 - 2020) who underwent the foundation course.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants from whom feedback could not be obtained despite reminders due to their absence were excluded.

Out of a total of 100 MBBS students enrolled in the 2019 - 20 session all attended the foundation course and were given the questionnaire, but 96 students returned the completed questionnaire within the stipulated time frame. Hence, the sample size of our study was 96.

Tools

A predesigned structured questionnaire which was further validated by medical education unit members of the institution comprising of:

- Instructions for filling the questionnaire;
- Close-ended questions (15 in number) on the overall experience of the course (to be rated on a five-point Likert scale);
- Additional comment section seeking their opinion about the relevance of individual modules and the topics included in the modules;
- Open-ended section on how could the course be improved, seeking their opinion and suggestions for improvement.

The following 15 questions were given

1. The course fulfilled the objectives set out in the brochure
2. The course satisfied my own needs and expectations
3. The content was presented at a level which could readily be understood
4. There was an opportunity for group work
5. There was an opportunity for individual participation
6. The material presented had practical relevance
7. The course content built on prior learning and experience
8. I feel I contributed to class discussion
9. I was motivated to learn
10. Course hand-outs & texts helped reinforce learning
11. There were a variety of teaching methods
12. The teaching methods used helped me to learn effectively
13. The tutor knew his / her subject thoroughly
14. The tutor achieved a good rapport with the group
15. There was opportunity for feedback and evaluation

Likert type scales use fixed choice response formats and are designed to measure attitudes or opinions. They help in rating the level of agreement / disagreement for a given item or statement.⁴

Data Collection

The study was conducted in November 2019 after communicating the institutional ethics committee and receiving their approval. A 10 min briefing was given to the respondents regarding the purpose of the study and on how to fill in the questionnaire. Sufficient time was given to fill the same. Doubts regarding the questions were clarified. To enable the participants to give their responses frankly and honestly, they were instructed to fill in the questionnaire anonymously.

Statistical Analysis

The data, thus obtained, were analysed later by the authors. Statistical analysis involved calculating the percentages of the different responses given by the students for each question by standard software.

RESULTS

The responses obtained from the students were tabulated and percentage of agreement or disagreement for each item of the questionnaire were individually calculated. In total 96 students completed the 'feedback' form and submitted within the stipulated time frame that was given to them. The results from their responses are displayed in the following table in which the first figure in the cells for each response are the absolute numbers of the respondents out of the 96 who gave that particular response, while the figures in parenthesis denote their percentage.

Sl. No	Response to the Questionnaire (n = 96)	Likert Scale Score				
		Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	Response to the question 1	29 (30.2 %)	57 (59.37 %)	8 (8.33 %)	2 (2.08 %)	0 (0 %)
2	Response to the question 2	28 (29.16 %)	50 (52.08 %)	15 (15.62 %)	2 (2.08 %)	0 (0 %)
3	Response to the question 3	38 (39.58 %)	47 (49.95 %)	7 (7.29 %)	4 (4.16 %)	0 (0 %)
4	Response to the question 4	20 (20.83 %)	50 (52.08 %)	14 (14.58 %)	12 (12.5 %)	0 (0 %)
5	Response to the question 5	33 (34.37 %)	46 (47.91 %)	15 (15.62 %)	2 (2.08 %)	0 (0 %)
6	Response to the question 6	45 (46.87 %)	42 (43.95 %)	8 (8.33 %)	1 (1.04 %)	0 (0 %)
7	Response to the question 7	31 (32.29 %)	50 (52.08 %)	10 (10.41 %)	5 (5.20 %)	0 (0 %)
8	Response to the question 8	17 (17.7 %)	58 (60.41 %)	16 (16.66 %)	5 (5.20 %)	0 (0 %)
9	Response to the question 9	56 (58.33 %)	34 (35.41 %)	6 (6.25 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
10	Response to the question 10	30 (31.25 %)	53 (55.2 %)	13 (13.54 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
11	Response to the question 11	38 (39.58 %)	36 (37.5 %)	18 (18.75 %)	4 (4.16 %)	0 (0 %)
12	Response to the question 12	36 (37.5 %)	48 (50 %)	12 (12.5 %)	1 (1.04 %)	0 (0 %)
13	Response to the question 13	65 (67.7 %)	25 (26.04 %)	6 (6.25 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
14	Response to the question 14	35 (36.45 %)	46 (47.91 %)	12 (12.5 %)	3 (3.12 %)	0 (0 %)
15	Response to the question 15	51 (53.12 %)	37 (38.54 %)	8 (8.33 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

Table 1. Tabulation of Responses to the Different Items in the Questionnaire

In response to the first question of the questionnaire, most of the students agreed (a total of 86 out of 96 students i.e., 89.6 %) with the comment that 'the course fulfilled the objectives set out in the brochure'. Only 2 (2.08 %) students disagreed with the statement. (Table 1; Sl. No. 1).

52.08 % students agreed and 29.16 % students strongly agreed that the course satisfied their need and expectations. Only 2.08 % disagreed with the statement. (Table 1; Sl. No. 2).

39.58 % students strongly agreed and another 49.95 % agreed about the fact that the contents were readily understandable. (Table 1; Sl. No. 3).

Group dynamics was explained, and its essence was infused in the students by many group activities during the course. 52.08 % agreed and another 20.83 % students strongly agreed that they had the opportunity to attend a good number of group activity. (Table 1; Sl. No. 4).

To a question on the opportunity of individual participation, a total of 79 (33 + 46) students (82.3 %) generally agreed. Only 2 students (2.08 %) did not agree with this. (Table 1; Sl. No. 5).

Regarding practical relevance of study materials of foundation course, 87 students agreed about that. Only 1.04 % students did not agree with the statement. (Table 1; Sl. No. 6).

A total of 81 out of 96 students agreed with the fact that the course content was built on prior learning and experience and so it was really easy to comprehend. (Table 1; Sl. No. 7)

75 out of 96 students felt that they contributed to class discussion and there lied the success of the foundation course. The course basically wants to make the students to open up in appropriate place and that appears to be fulfilled in general though there is always room for improvement. (Table 1; Sl. No. 8).

59.33 % students strongly agreed and another 35.41 % students agreed that by the said course, they were motivated to learn. This again indicates that the foundation course can be an apt tool to foster adult learning. (Table 1; Sl. No. 9). 83 out of 96 students agreed that there was adequate supply of course handouts & texts and that helped in reinforcement of learning. (Table 1; Sl. No. 10)

39.58 % students strongly agreed and another 37.05 % also agreed with the fact that a wide variety of teaching learning methods were used in the course. (Table 1; Sl. No. 11). 84 out of 96 students agreed that use of multiple Teaching/Learning materials (TLM) actually helped in effective learning. (Table 1; Sl. No. 12).

90 out of 96 students agreed that the tutor was relevant to actual topic with good subject grip (Table 1; Sl. No. 13). This actually is very important as in this course, the faculties taught the students, going out of their speciality domain. 36.45 % students strongly agreed and another 47.91 % also agreed that the communication of the teacher with the student group was good and here also lies the importance of the foundation course implementation. (Table 1; Sl. No. 14).

88 out of 96 students agreed that there was an opportunity for feedback and evaluation. Obviously as feedback is there, there is chance of formative assessment

in the course and that is the best point in today's learning experience. (Table 1; Sl. No. 15)

DISCUSSION

The students are coming to study MBBS from different boards of education with different syllabus and different regional language of instruction. For getting adapted to the new college environment from their school environment they may need some time and some effort from the college side and foundation course can provide that.⁵ Students in small groups were scheduled to do guided hospital tour, visit to nearby health centres, community visits and all.

As per MCI's Medical Education Program of 2019,² a month-long foundation course was designed and implemented in our Government run medical college of West Bengal for the newly enrolled MBBS batch (2019 - 2020). Our study was conducted to obtain the opinion of the students in terms of their overall experience of this newly introduced course, their feeling regarding the aptness of the course content and get their suggestions for future amendments.

Extensive literature search yielded only a few published papers on this topic. Most of the studies were performed to evaluate the foundation course program from students' perspective alone;⁶⁻¹⁴ except for one which showed faculty's perspective also.¹⁵ As far as the course content is concerned, some three recent studies evaluated one month-long MCI recommended foundation course.⁶⁻⁸ Similar results as in our study was obtained by Khilnani AK *et al.* in their study seeking feedback from students regarding their overall experience of foundation course. Some 22.3 % and 41.9 % students rated their overall experience as excellent and very good, respectively, 33.8 % rated it as good, whereas the rest gave an unfavourable response.⁶

In another similar study from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, 88.4 % students gave a favourable response for the foundation course.⁷ In another such study conducted by Dixit R *et al.*, seeking the perception of students regarding foundation course on a 5-point Likert scale, an overall rating of 4.19 was obtained which indicated their high level of satisfaction with the course.⁸

In a study conducted in a medical college of Kerala, 40 % students opined that the course was excellent, 50 % rated it as very good, 7 % as good and 3 % satisfactory.¹³ Thus, as per the results obtained from all these studies, it can be said that more or less, such foundation courses are taken positively by the students. The study from Gujarat also observed that students appreciated topics dealing with skill development namely communication skills, learning skills, first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and English proficiency.¹⁴ This is quite similar to our experience.

One aspect of students' feedback was that majority of them felt that including role plays and small-group activities would make the different sessions more interactive and will help to generate interest in the topic. They generally agreed to the fact that most of the sessions were very informative and beneficial.

In the future the foundation course can be designed in a way so as to ensure more student involvement. Innovations like a conducting a quiz at the end of certain sessions like 'History of Medicine and 'National health Scenario' would stimulate the students to be more involved in them since even though they appear mundane topics yet the students themselves felt were very relevant. Designing of E-Posters or small-group projects can also contribute towards making some serious topics more appealing. Improving communication skills can be attempted by encouraging E-class magazine publication by the students.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study proves the need of the foundation course for the students entering MBBS stream. Proper implementation of foundation course with suitable teaching learning methods and tools will help the students to acquire the basic skills necessary for their para clinical and clinical phases of the course and in long run in their medical practice also. The course is already well accepted by the students whose feedback has more than established the fact that the sessions were enlightening for most of them and much helpful to deal with many real-life situations at the beginning of their journey in a challenging professional course. Their positive feedback and pertinent suggestions will definitely encourage the involved faculties as well as the institute on a whole to execute the foundation course in a more user-friendly and structured manner in the future years to come.

Data sharing statement provided by the authors is available with the full text of this article at jebmh.com.

Financial or other competing interests: None.

Disclosure forms provided by the authors are available with the full text of this article at jebmh.com.

The authors acknowledge the immense support of the students who participated in the study.

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