

Abstract

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ON MEDICAL STUDENTS UNDER DIFFERENT TYPES OF MANAGEMENT IN MEDICAL COLLEGES

by

Thomas Philip

With the objective of improving the health services, a number of suggestions to inculcate certain people-oriented values have been made by medical visionaries in different societies. These basically deal with the need for doctors to have an empathic attitude towards their patients and to keep themselves abreast with the rapidly growing medical knowledge.

In the last 25 years, various committees starting with the Mudaliar Committee have given a number of recommendations as to the orientation needed for an effective medical practitioner in the Indian situation. These mainly refer to the emphasis they give to preventive medicine in health care, population control measures, health education of the people and to have a community health approach where integrated health care is provided by a team of health workers.

It is the responsibility of the management of each medical college in India to try to inculcate those values in their students which will produce medical graduates with the desired value system and to monitor the degree of success obtained through an effective feedback system. Medical education in India is being imparted through medical colleges under four types of managements, viz., Category I : State government/local government; Category II : central government; Category III : capitation fee charging private managements; and Category IV : philanthropic private organizations.

This study was designed to investigate: (a) the difference between the freshmen and the seniors on the following variables : treating a patient as an individual; listening and communicating one's interest in him; promptly referring patients whenever required; continuing medical education and then orientation; towards preventive medicine; a managerial-physician concept; population control and health education and, (b) to examine whether significant differences could be found between the students of the four types of medical colleges.

Data for this study was collected from 150 freshmen, 150 seniors and 120 teachers from five medical colleges and through interviews of senior administrative officers. The colleges studied were : from Category I - Stanley Medical College, Madras and Trivandrum Medical College; from Category II - JIPMER, Pondicherry; from Category III - JNMC, Belgaum; and from Category IV - St. John's Medical College, Bangalore.

The results show that in the total sample of students : seniors as compared to freshmen are more preventive-medicine-oriented, are more receptive to the managerial-physician concept, are more aware of the importance of promptly referring their patients and are more conscious of the need for constantly updating their knowledge. However, senior students show less concern for the welfare of the patient, give less importance to health education and find a medical career less attractive. There is not much difference between seniors and freshmen in their approach towards population control, listening to patients and as regards their awareness of the socio-economic situation prevalent in the country.

From these results it can be concluded that the presently held assumption of most medical college managements that students will imbibe the desired values through informal interaction with the college environment needs to be reappraised.

Comparing the responses of students of the different colleges, it is seen that students from those colleges which have a well-defined objective to instil

these values in their students, are more oriented in the desired direction, viz., colleges in Category IV and Category II. From interviews with the management and observation of the 5 colleges, it is seen that colleges in these two categories have a larger degree of autonomy, give considerable importance to the aptitude and orientation of students at the time of admission and make serious efforts to improve the interaction between teachers and students. These measures, along with the clearly defined objective to inculcate these values in their students, have probably helped create a learning environment more conducive to producing doctors who are closer to the ideal set out.

The results of the study suggest that to inculcate desired qualities in students, formal methods can be used successfully and if medical graduates with the required orientation are to be produced, then the managements of medical colleges will have to clearly define their objectives and ensure ways to achieve them.