

Letter to the Editor

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Perception of Medical Freshmen towards Public Health

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Dear Sir,

The current shift of emphasis from curative to preventive medicine makes community-based medical education of utmost importance. Even though only a small proportion of medical graduates will eventually choose public health as their specialty, a thorough knowledge-base established through robust undergraduate training programmes in community medicine is essential for all practicing doctors. Despite this,

the importance and significance of public health are often not fully appreciated,^{1,2} with more emphasis being placed on hospital-based and curative medicine.

The Department of Community Medicine at Pondicherry institute of Medical Sciences took the first year medical students to rural health centres as a part of orientation towards community medicine and explained the

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students about the activities and functions of Rural Health Training Center (RHTC). This was followed by visit to the field practice area of the RHTC. The students were allowed to interact with the village people and were asked to collect details regarding the socio demographic and health status of the individual and family. Following the visit to the village, the students were asked to fill the questionnaire containing details regarding their perception towards public health, Community Medicine and its activities.

About 90% of the first year students participated in the study, most of the students said that Community Medicine is a branch which *“deals with the health of rural and unreached population”*. Almost all the students (98%) felt that the *orientation through field visits is better* and 42 % of students said they have *never visited* a village. Most (80%) of students responded correctly the abbreviation of RHTC which is *“Rural Health Training Center”* and Maximum number of students (60%) said that RHTC’s main function is to *provide primary health care apart from teaching clinical skills to students*.

The method that we used to assess students perception regarding community medicine and its applications in the health was indirectly trying to prepare the students to introduce the

subject as well as to generate interest among them. It may be argued that student’s perceptions on various aspects of the medical field are interdependent, and therefore, cannot be considered in isolation. Evidence suggests that perceptions influence learning. It is clear that perceptions alone may be inadequate in aiding assessment as they are subjective and liable to be affected by various situations and variables.

Even though the students were not able to give a correct definition of community medicine, they could imbibe from the orientation program, some aspects of the subject. This will orient them for self learning and further interest in the subject. Almost 97% of the students wanted to visit the village again and some of the students (20%) responded that there is lack of awareness about health among villagers and that can be improved by reaching to the community only. This shows the motivation of the students to do rural service which is the need of the hour. This type of exercise will help to motivate the students to do rural service in the future. Community-based learning is viewed positively by students, making these experiences mutually beneficial to both community and student is likely to inspire students to think favourably about a future in public health.

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