



PERCEPTION TOWARDS COMMUNITY MEDICINE AS A SUBJECT AND CAREER OPTION AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS IN A MEDICAL COLLEGE, INDORE, MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Community Medicine is meant to equip the students with the knowledge and skills order to identify the prevalent health problems in the community and find methods of alleviating them.

Objective: To assess the general perception of students towards community medicine and analyze if students prefer community medicine for a career.

Methodology: This was a cross sectional study, carried out in a Medical college of Indore City, from Jan - May 2016. A predesigned, pretested, semi structured questionnaire was used.

Results: 101 students participated in the study, with 42 (41.58%) males and 59(58.42%) females. 82 (81.19%) understand the concept of community medicine and 90(89.12%) had realized its relevance. About 74(73.27%) said that they would not prefer community medicine as a career with reasons cited as low pay scale (p value <0.0001), less prestige (p value 0.000045) and status (p value 0.023), lack of fame (p value 0.0246) and career satisfaction (p value <0.0001).

Conclusion: Students seem to understand the subject and don't have an issue with the topics, or its projection, however there is reluctance to choose it as a career.

Key Words: Community Medicine, Perception, Career.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of community medicine is relatively new, as it is a successor of what was previously known as public health, community health, preventive and social medicine, which all share a common ground i.e. prevention of disease and promotion of health. India is in a phase of rapid health transition.¹ Today there is an unfinished agenda of infectious diseases, nutritional deficiencies and unsafe pregnancies as well as the challenges of escalating epidemics of non-communicable diseases and emerging/ re-emerging epidemics of infectious diseases and this needs a concerted public health response to prevent disease and promote health in masses.²

A working group for the seventh five year plan estimated the number of public health managers needed as 9,600 to 10,750 by the year 2010. There is an additional need of 1000 public health specialists for programs run by the international agencies. The yearly output from existing public

Health institutions are not more than 400. National Commission on Macroeconomics & Health -2005 also identified acute shortage of human resources for health of all categories, including lack of good teaching faculty, low quality of instruction and skill acquisition and neglect of Community medicine.²

Community Medicine is meant to equip the students with the knowledge and skills to carry out epidemiological studies in order to identify the prevalent health problems in the community and also determine ways and methods of alleviating them.³ Studies done in Jordan and Pakistan are suggestive of the fact that students prefer to select a clinical specialty as a career choice.^{4,5}

OBJECTIVES

This study was conducted to assess the general perception of students towards community medicine as a subject, including their opinions on the current study pattern and to analyze students' preference of community medicine as a career choice.

METHODOLOGY

This was a cross sectional type of study, carried out in a Medical college of Indore City. The duration of the study was from Jan 2015 to May 2016.

Students were randomly selected from the attendance registers in the Dept. of community medicine and the interns who were at that time posted in community medicine, these students were requested to remain behind after classes for 10-15 minutes and a verbal consent was taken from these students. First years were not included in the study as it was deemed that they had not had sufficient exposure to the subject. A total of 150 students were approached of which the first 15 were considered for the pilot study so as to assess the viability and feasibility of the questions, a feedback was taken from these students. A further 135 students were requested to fill the questionnaire out of which only 127 consented. After analyzing the

data, it was found that only 101 questionnaires were completely filled with appropriate answers. These 101 were considered for the study.

A predesigned, pretested, semi structured questionnaire was used, consisting of 27 carefully analyzed questions derived from previous such studies^{2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9} and from deliberations with the teaching faculty.

Data was entered into the computer from the questionnaires by two people i.e. one read the answers and the other fed them into the computer so as to reduce bias. The answers to the questions were presented as appropriate proportions and chi square test was applied on the variables. P value of <0.05 was considered significant.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows a total of 101 students participated in the study, of which 42 (41.58%) were males and 59(58.42%) were females. The distribution of students across the various years of MBBS study was uniform. Religion and Caste were not considered. A Total of 82 (81.19%) students claimed to have understood the concept of community medicine and 90(89.12%) felt that they had realized the relevance of community medicine to the health issue as well as having gained knowledge useful for their careers as doctors. Almost 80(79.21%) students had attended community medicine lectures as often as the lectures of other disciplines and 62(61.39%) students felt that the sequencing of topics was logical, however inspite of this 62(61.39%) participants felt that the lectures weren't stimulating enough and a similar number felt that the lectures were lengthy, 61(60.40%) said that they did not have completed notes in the subject.

Table 1: Perception of students towards Community Medicine as a subject (n=101)

Question	Agree			Disagree			P value (x ²)
	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Have you understood the main concept of community medicine?	35	47	82	7	12	19	0.64(0.21)
Have you realized the relevance of community medicine to the real health issue?	36	54	90	6	5	11	0.51(0.44)
Do you feel that your skill have improved in solving problems in community medicine?	21	27	48	21	32	53	0.67(0.18)
Do you feel that the knowledge and experience that you gained will be useful for your career as a doctor?	36	54	90	6	5	11	0.36(0.85)
Was the sequencing of topics in community medicine logical?	28	34	62	14	25	39	0.36(0.85)
Were the community medicine lectures interesting/stimulating?	14	25	39	28	34	62	0.36(0.85)
Were the community medicine lectures lengthy?	15	24	39	27	35	62	0.61(0.26)
Were the community medicine lectures too many or too few in number?	16	30	46	26	29	55	0.20(1.61)
Did you attend community medicine lectures as often as you did for other courses?	31	48	79	11	11	22	0.37(0.82)
Do you have completed notes in community medicine?	13	27	40	29	32	61	0.13(2.25)
Were you encouraged to participate in the classroom?	25	31	56	17	28	45	0.46(0.48)
Do you feel that community medicine has a high status in the medical field?	24	36	60	18	23	51	0.7(0.15)

M=Male; F=Female; T=Total

Table 2: Perception of Students towards Community Medicine as a Career option (n=101)

Question	Agree			Disagree			P value (x ²)
	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Would you consider community medicine as a career option?	10	17	27	32	42	74	0.58(0.31)
Do you feel that community medicine will provide a salary which is comparable to other professions?	12	15	27	30	44	74	0.72(0.12)
Do you feel that community medicine has a high level of scientific prestige equivalent to other specialties?	17	15	32	25	44	69	0.11(2.56)
Do you feel that you can achieve fame in CM as compared to other disciplines?	20	25	45	22	34	56	0.60(0.27)
Do you feel you will be satisfied with a career in CM?	11	20	31	31	39	70	0.41(0.69)
Do you think a career in CM will bring you recognition in society?	21	28	49	21	31	52	0.80(0.06)
Is there enough information regarding CM as a future prospect?	10	15	25	32	44	76	0.85(0.03)
Are you impressed with anyone in the field of CM?	23	34	57	19	25	44	0.77(0.08)
Have you seen anyone doing well in the field of CM?	28	34	62	14	25	39	0.36(0.85)
Is the pay scale in CM more as compared to other disciplines?	11	15	26	31	44	75	0.93(0.0075)
Was the subject projected well by faculty and postgraduate students?	29	47	76	13	12	25	0.22(1.48)
Do you think Faculty and Postgraduates are satisfied after choosing CM?	17	24	41	25	35	60	0.98(0.00004)

M=Male; F=Female; T=Total

Table 3: Factors influencing Community Medicine as A career option (n=101)

Factors	Will Consider Community Medicine as a Career		Significance (p value)
	Agree (n=27)	Disagree (n=74)	
Comparable Salary to other Professions			
Agree	18	9	<0.0001**
Disagree	9	65	
Presence of Scientific Prestige			
Agree	17	15	0.000045**
Disagree	10	59	
Comparable Status			
Agree	21	39	0.023**
Disagree	6	35	
Comparable Fame in Community Medicine			
Agree	17	28	0.0246**
Disagree	10	46	
Career Satisfaction			
Agree	19	12	<0.0001**
Disagree	8	62	
Recognition in Society			
Agree	16	33	0.1918
Disagree	11	41	
Lack of Info. As a career prospect.			
Agree	8	17	0.4926
Disagree	19	57	
Presence of Role models in Community Medicine			
Agree	19	43	0.2626
Disagree	8	31	
Dissatisfaction among current Doctors in Community Medicine			
Agree	14	27	0.164
Disagree	13	47	

Table 2 shows that out of 101, 74(73.27%) students said that they would not opt for community medicine as a career and they felt that Community medicine would not provide a salary comparable to other disciplines/ less pay scale. More than half of the participants felt that it is difficult to achieve fame or get recognition in society in Community Medicine. A large number i.e. 76(75.25%) students felt that there wasn't enough information regarding Community Medicine as a career prospect and 70(69.31%) students were of the opinion that they would not be satisfied with a career in community

medicine. A total of 60(59.41%) students felt that the current doctors in the field seem to be dissatisfied with their career choice. However, a significant number i.e. 57(56.44%) & 62(61.39%), said that they have been impressed with or seen someone do well in Community Medicine respectively. A large number 76(75.25%) felt that the subject was projected well by the faculties and post graduate students.

No significant associations were found for the questions with Age, Gender or year of study.

Table 3 however shows there was association between choosing community medicine as a career choice and, salary as compared to other disciplines (p value <0.0001), scientific prestige as compared to other professions (p value 0.000045), status in society (p value 0.023), fame in community medicine as compared to other disciplines (p value 0.0246), satisfaction gained, (p value <0.0001).

DISCUSSION

A higher percentage of students (81.19% & 89.12%) in our study claim to have understood the concept and realized the importance of community medicine as compared to the study conducted by Saleh A. in Iraq⁶ (40.3% & 36%), but the study conducted by Onwasigwe et al shows that almost all students (97.8%) felt that Community Medicine was important in the health sector.³

Students in our study agreed that they attended the Community Medicine lectures as much as other discipline (79.21%) which was concurred by the result in the study conducted by Onwasigwe et al, and 61.39% of participants felt that the lectures weren't stimulating enough, which again was similar to the study by Onwasigwe et al.³

A large percentage of students (61.39%) felt that the lectures weren't stimulating enough which is similar to the study conducted in Nigeria, however only 60.40% of the participants said that they had complete notes in Community medicines in our study and this number was much higher in the Nigerian study³

More than 50% of the students said that they were encouraged to participate in the classrooms which is similar to the study conducted in Iraq, however our study shows that a higher percentage of students (60.40%) have an issue with the length of lectures and this number was significantly lower in the Iraq study.

The study conducted by Singh M K et al shows that only 15.6 % students and the study done in Colombo by Navinan M R et al shows that only 9 % students opt for community medicine as a career option, this number however is higher in our study (26.73%), the reasons for not selecting Community Medicine as a career are similar such as fame, prestige, status and job satisfaction, but in our study there is a significant relationship income and career choice which is not reflected in the study by Singh M K et al² and the study by Navinan M R¹⁰

In the studies conducted in Pakistan and Jordan Community medicine seems to be one of the least preferable discipline as a career choice which is adequately reflected in our study.^{5,6}

The study conducted by Tyler et al on Canadian Medical students shows that lack of role models is a big influence on the perception of students towards the subject of public health and the curriculum, however our study shows that an large number of students have seen successful people in the field of community medicine, who can be considered as role models.¹¹

When a student enters into the medical field, he brings his perceptions and feelings of 18-20 years with him, his attitude is already preformed regarding certain issues. Therefore it stands to reason that it is very difficult to impact the thinking of the student in just 4-5 years of medical study. However certain factors may influence the perception of the student such as early exposure to community health care, clinical medicine and the perception of the student by himself as well as his peers.¹²

Our study reflects on the fact that the students generally have a favorable attitude towards the subject, but despite being exposed to the subject almost throughout their college years they do not opt for community medicine as a career option. This issue needs to be examined and addressed accordingly

CONCLUSIONS

As per the results obtained in our study, it seem that students seem to understand the subject well and they do not have an issue with the topics, or projection of the subject. The students also seem to attend the lectures as often as other disciplines in spite of some students having a less favorable attitude towards the length of the lectures and stimulation gained.

However despite the above facts when it comes to choosing the subject as a career choice the students seem to be reluctant to do so for various reasons such as the pay scale, prestige, fame and status in society. Most participants also felt that the satisfaction gained after choosing Community Medicine might not be enough.

Limitations: This study may not be adequate to reflect the general medical student population, however the results obtained seem to be synonymous with other larger studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A minority of the students have actually selected their fields at the start of the MBBS curriculum therefore there is plenty of time to provide the students with a better and favorable outlook on the

actual scope and potential of the subject of Community medicine. This can be achieved possibly by better projection of the subject as a good career option by successful figures in the field sharing their experiences with the students. Increasing the interactions within the classrooms, with helpful activities such as competitive quizzes occasionally held within the classrooms and increasing the practical sessions could bring about a more amicable competitive atmosphere providing a fun learning experience.

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