

Selecting an Appropriate Site for Medical Education

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Abstract

The present study aims at locating the appropriate site for the training of medical students. It is argued that in community oriented medical education the training of medical students should take place where more patients come for consultation. This will result in students having a greater exposure to patients with a variety of medical problems.

In order to find out the places where more patients went for medical advice, a questionnaire was designed and filled out by one percent of the population of Esfahan, one of the main provinces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A total of 33,714 questionnaires were filled out. The questions asked were whether the respondent had any medical complaints in the previous month, whether s/he had been hospitalised during the previous month, and if that was the case, how s/he had managed the problem.

11,230 respondents reported of at least one medical problem, but only 9,818 had sought

medical advice. 9,672 respondents out of 9,818 underwent treatment in outpatient clinics and the rest were hospitalised. Among the 146 hospitalised cases, only 74 cases were in teaching hospitals, that is only 0.7% of the total number of respondents who reported that they had medical problems. 945 respondents reported at least four days rest at home, that is 6 times more than hospitalised cases.

The results of the study indicate that hospitals may not be the only right place for the training of medical students. Places such as outpatient departments and ambulatory care centers attend to more patients and therefore give students greater exposure to a variety of medical problems.

Key Words: community, medical education, outpatient, ambulatory care.

Introduction

There are two prerequisites for the training of medical students: patients and hospitals. Apart from these two elements, there are other

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educational resources or facilities such as libraries, research centers, outpatient departments, and ambulatory care centers which are normally part of the hospitals all over the world and are considered to be very helpful in training medical students (1,2). However, in Iran, medical training is more centered in the hospitals, with minimum reference to outpatient departments or ambulatory care centers. The present study aims at locating the appropriate place for the training of medical students, where what is appropriate is defined as the site or sites which can provide a variety of clinical problems for the training of medical students.

Material & Methods

One percent of the population of the Esfahan (33714), one of the main provinces of Islamic Republic of Iran, participated in the study. They were asked whether they had any medical complaints during the previous month and whether they had been hospitalised during the previous year. If the answer was positive, they were then asked to fill out the rest of the questionnaire which regarded the place they received medical attention, that is whether it was at a hospital, outpatient department, or other, and also whether it was in the private or governmental sector.

Fig1: Prevalence of health problems and responsibility of the medical facilities (Akbari 1991)

1000	Population at risk	1000		
337	Feel sick		337	
292	Seek medical facility		292	
4	General hospital		4	
2	Teaching hospital		2	

Results

Of the 33,714 respondents in this study, 55% were from the urban area and 45% from the rural area. 11,230 out of 33,714 respondents reported having medical complaints during the previous month (33.3%). However, only 9818 respondents stated that they sought medical attention (87.5%). Out of that, 9672 reported that they had been attended to in outpatient clinics and 146 reported being hospitalised. Only 74 out of 146 respondents stated they had been hospitalised in the teaching hospitals (0.7%).

In order to be able to compare the results of the present study with those of Wright and Creen Berg 's study (3), the data were randomly reduced to 1000 cases. According to the new data analysis, 334 suffered from medical problems but only 292 respondents sought medical attention. 56.8%

received medical attention in the outpatient clinics of the private sector and the rest in the governmental sector. 4 out of 292 respondents were hospitalised and 2 out of the 4 were in teaching hospitals. This was less than 0.6% of all those who sought medical advice (Figure 1).

Figure 2 indicates the comparison between Wright and Creen Berg 's study and the present study. As the table shows, 0.4% of the patients in Wright and Creen Berg 's study were hospitalised in teaching hospitals compared to the 1.15% in our study. However it is worth noting that half the beds in Iranian hospitals are dedicated to the teaching hospitals.

Another important issue in this study is that 945 respondents stated that they stayed in bed in their own homes and 146 stated that they were hospitalised. This is a ratio of 6:1

Fig2: Comparison of two studies for community health problems and responsibility of medical facilities

Akbari's study 1991					Wright's study 1987				
1000				1000	Population at risk	1000	1000		
296				296	Feel sick	750	750		
258				258	Seek medical facilities	250	250		
6				6	General hospital	9	9		
3				3	Teaching hospital	1	1		

Discussion

The patient is considered to be one of the main elements in the training of medical students (4). The general assumption is that hospitals are the best places for students to come in contact with patients. However, the results of this study indicate that the hospital is not the only place for the training of medical students. Outpatient clinics and ambulatory care centers are two important places where more patients are managed and can be regarded as two crucial educational centers. The recommendation is that there needs to be a shift in the emphasis from hospitals to the community, and particularly to outpatient clinics and ambulatory centers. This will provide the basis for better education and also enable a more community oriented approach to medical education. It is not just the hospitals where the patients are, but in fact it is also the community that is a grand hospital for many patients and this is something that should never be ignored by medical faculties.

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