

EXPLORING MEDICAL students' experiences of assessment in a renewed medical curriculum

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Abstract

Background

The MBChB programme at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS), Stellenbosch University (SU), embarked on a process of curriculum renewal with implementation in 2022. The renewed curriculum signalled a shift from a traditional disciplinary to an integrated curriculum. Furthermore, we moved from more traditional examination-based high-stakes assessment formats to multiple, varied, low-stakes assessments, with the view to enhance deep, as well as self-directed and lifelong learning. Given that assessment influences how students approach learning, it is necessary to explore how students experienced this new approach to assessment¹.

Summary of work

Our larger study looks at the first 18 months in the curriculum, which include three, six-month long integrated modules. The aim of this study was to explore how medical students experience assessment in the 2nd and 3rd modules of the renewed curriculum. We conducted focus group interviews with students at the end of the two respective modules. Recordings were transcribed verbatim, and thematically analysed.

Results

Four main themes were derived from the data including, students' understanding influences assessment experiences, the effect of assessment, the quality of the assessment tasks and students' engagement with feedback.

Discussion

Students understanding of the assessment practices influenced their experiences. Despite our assessment design, they seemed to be strategic in their approach to learning by selecting what they believed to be most important. They could also identify what valuable feedback was and requested more.

Conclusions

The results suggest that students understand the value of assessment and feedback, but that they are strategic in their behaviour. To foster deep learning curriculum developers, need to take cognisance of the structure of the modules in terms of the number, spacing and type of assessments.

Take-home message

Assessment tasks should be aligned to the principles of good assessment such as relevance, fair and timeous feedback.

References (maximum three)

Norcini J, Anderson MB, Bollela V, Burch V, Costa MJ, Duvivier R, Hays R, Palacios Mackay MF, Roberts T, Swanson D. 2018 Consensus framework for good assessment. *Medical teacher*. 2018 Nov 2;40(11):1102-9.