

Role-play – An effective tool to teach communication skills in pediatrics to medical undergraduates: Comments

Sir,

We read with great interest the article titled, “Role-play – An effective tool to teach communication skills in pediatrics to medical undergraduates” by Bindu T Nair.^[1]

The outcome of the author’s study was that role-play sessions had a positive impact in improving communication skills in undergraduates. We commend the author for addressing a major lapse in our undergraduate training and strongly agree to the fact that it is the need of the hour to train medical professionals in communication skills.^[1] We also agree with the author that good communication skills need to be taught to medical undergraduates to make them doctors of greater clinical competence and that communication skills can never be taught by didactic lectures.^[1,2] We like to share our experience of utilizing role-play in teaching communication skills to 1st-year medical undergraduates as a pilot project.

The Medical Council of India has recently introduced the Attitude, Ethics and Communication module as part of the new competency-based curriculum; it is a longitudinal module with intention of being implemented throughout the course.^[3] It is a validated document, and one of the modules for 1st-year provides an introduction to doctor–patient communication to students. The module also recommends the use of the Kalamazoo consensus statement as a working model of teaching communication skills.

With the belief “the earlier the better,” we conducted this pilot project on the 1st-year undergraduate students to target them early in their professional career for a topic as sensitive as “communication skills.” The aim was to introduce effective listening, verbal and nonverbal communication, and creating respect in patient encounter. The students were discussed in advance about the role-play and they rehearsed it in small group, which was then presented and discussed in large group. The feedback questionnaire was discussed among Medical Education Unit members, and feedback was taken at the end of session by Google Form. A total of 74 students were included in the form of performers and observers; among these, 59 students completed the feedback

questionnaire. All 59 (100%) students agreed that communication skills are important in doctor–patient relationship; 49 (83.05%) students agreed that role-play facilitated their learning of communication skills; 52 (88.1%) students agreed that this exercise will help them in understanding communication between patient and doctor in a better way in future; and 49 (83.05%) students agreed that such exercises will help them in becoming a better doctor and thus improving patient care in future.

Role-play is indeed a very effective method of teaching communication skills, but given time limitations on behalf of faculty, it sometimes becomes difficult to practice in many practical scenarios. We are further in the process of utilizing video-assisted learning for teaching communication skills to undergraduates wherein role-plays in varied clinical scenarios can be recorded and discussed. We believe that video-assisted learning will help in overcoming these limitations and would help students to be exposed to varied scenario through role-play with limited faculty and less time limitations.^[4,5]

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Letter to Editor

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