

Students' Surgical Training - A Continuous Challenge

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The Letter

I read with great interest the papers published in the International Journal of Medical Students regarding teaching practices of medical students worldwide.¹⁻⁴ Nekkanti et al and Althubaiti et al stressed out important trends in the manner medical students perceive the curriculum proposed by their universities: there is an increasing desire among undergraduates enrolled in medical schools for changes in the current manner medicine is taught; students wish their training to be focused more on research and hands-on activities rather than theoretical courses.¹⁻² Important progress seems to have been made already, with some universities offering opportunities for medical students to partake in extracurricular activities centered on educational policies, such as the report of Allard et al on how undergraduates contributed to the development of an OSCE (objective structured clinical examinations) guide for their peers.³ Hussain et al also commented on the important role peer-learning can play in medical education and how learning sessions among peers can provide a stimulating environment for students.⁴

As a surgeon, I believe that recent trends in medical education should stimulate us to rethink the way in which we teach Surgery to our students and fellows. In recent years, the increasingly important role of hands-on training sessions for surgeons has become evident. Gradually, these types of activities have been expanded for medical students as well, with the essential contribution of student scientific societies. Many medical students choose to acquire general or specialty-specific clinical experience, to further explore career opportunities and to increase their chances to enter their preferred specialty.

As lecturers, we have a rich experience in training programs and thus we are able to enjoy the participants' satisfaction and to get a confirmation of the utility of such programs. During 2014 and 2015, as a member of the development team of the two scientific grants, financed via the "Human Resources Development" Sectorial Operational Programme of the European Union, POSDRU/161/2.1/G/134858 (**Program of counseling for pupils and medical students and Surgical training**) and POSDRU/189/2.1/G/155735 (**Practical training in general surgery and gynecology and Counseling for medical students**), I could coordinate groups of students and teach them surgical maneuvers and abdominal ultrasound. The students enrolled in the project participated in a medical exchange program with the Urology Department of Hospital de Mollet, Barcelona, Spain. Thus, their experience was enriched by a one-week surgical internship at a European hospital.

Moreover, during the first edition of the **International Medical Students' Congress of Bucharest (IMSCB)**, we coordinated several hands-on lectures and tutorials of surgical sutures, surgical basic skills, surgical

skills in digestive surgery, abdominal ultrasound (general ultrasound or emergency ultrasound) and thoracic ultrasound (ultrasonography of the intercostal space). Every time, the participation was numerous and the feedback we received from the participants was positive. The students were extremely pleased with the training that they received during these workshops. As a confirmation of our work, we were pleased to organize a FAST (Focused Assessment with Sonography for Trauma) workshop during the second edition of the **International Medical Students' Congress of Bucharest** in December 2018. The success of these educational activities has prompted us not only to continue but also to improve, diversify and increase their number. Moreover, the partnership between the International Journal of Medical Students and IMSCB has increased the number of foreign students attending the event, allowing us to compare and contrast the way in which surgery is taught across Europe by receiving direct and post-congress feedback from the participants.

Another part of the surgical education of students is represented by live surgical demonstrations, which are very useful for surgical training to achieve or improve surgical skills. Either transmitted in a conference hall or online, the training value of these events is very high. Interactive questions increase their value nevertheless.⁵ We organized such live video sessions for students in our hospital and some surgical procedures (especially laparoscopic interventions) have been transmitted live in a lecture hall for all students to follow.

Besides their scientific value, educational programs also contribute significantly to the personal development of medical students. Empathy is a core element of the doctor-patient relationship and empathy in medical students can be improved by specific training.⁶ Students also have the opportunity to get in contact with surgeons and lecturers and to establishing new professional contacts. These networking opportunities may serve as the basis for further scientific collaboration for the benefit of all parties involved. The social role of congresses and medical meetings cannot be ignored, since these events may encourage the creation of a professional network, the exchange of new ideas and the birth of future collaboration projects.⁷ Students' surgical training programs are a continuous challenge - for lecturers to improve their teaching skills and practical applications and for students to be actively involved and receptive to new concepts. It is high time for a transition from the theoretical-based educational system to a more practical-based approach to teaching medicine (and surgery) and my opinion is that the **International Journal of Medical Students** could play a keyrole in the dissemination and implementation of new concepts in medical education, as well as research conducted by undergraduates.

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