

Original Article

A STUDY ON PATIENTS' PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARD MEDICAL STUDENTS IN TWO DIFFERENT HOSPITAL SETTING– HOSPITAL KULIM AND HOSPITAL KUALA LUMPUR

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ABSTRACT

The quality of education a medical student receives is found to be associated with the type of interaction and the amount of clinical cases a student is exposed to. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors that affect the attitude and perception of patients. The study is aimed to assess the perception and attitude of patients towards medical students in two different hospital settings: urban and suburban area. This cross sectional study took place in two different hospitals setting which are Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL) and Hospital Kulim (HK). A total of 213 patients were interviewed using a structured questionnaire regarding their perception and attitude towards medical students' involvement in their care. A total of 213 patients interviewed, 70% (n=149) were from HKL and 30% (n=64) from HK. Patients from HK had more positive attitude towards medical student compared to patients from HKL (mean Likert score=3.65/5). However, there was no significant difference between hospital settings and patient's attitude ($p>0.05$). Overall, 76.5% (n=163) patients agree and 7% (n=15) strongly agree to allow the involvement of medical students during clinical examination but 46.0% (n=98) disagree to be examined in the absence of doctor's supervision. There were no significant difference in association between patients' age, race, education level, occupation and marital status with their attitude ($p> 0.05$). Only patient's gender had significant difference relationship with their attitude ($p<0.05$). Out of all the patients who had a negative attitude, female patients (52.5%, n=63) appeared to be less receptive towards medical students compared to male patients (47.5%, n=57). This study shows no significant differences between patients' attitude in urban and suburban hospital settings toward medical students. However, medical students and clinical supervisors need to have better understanding of patient preference when students are involved in patients' management.

Key words: Perception, attitude and medical students

Introduction

Learning through interaction and direct contact with patients is a crucial part of medical students' education. A study¹ showed healthcare centres often provide the only variable opportunity for students to gain practical and clinical experience. Majority of studies indicate that patients are, in general, positive about students' participation². However, there is little information on this subject in relation to urban and suburban area. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyse the views of patients from urban and sub-urban hospitals regarding medical students' involvement in their care. This study was the breakthrough study that ever held in Malaysia regarding this matter.

Clinical years are said to be a period of utmost importance and is essential to all medical students. This platform provides a priceless opportunity for medical students to amass valuable knowledge and to gain experience that would eventually shape and mould their future career as doctors.

Although there are many alternatives to the medical education process, hospitals and patients are still thought of as the best conduit for medical students to gain clinical experience. While standardized patients and simulations are useful, they are unable to display clinical signs objectively. Thus, it is important to first recognize and acknowledge the role of patients as an impetus towards better medical education.

Many studies have found that patients are generally positive towards medical students. There are many factors that affect a patient's approval of allowing medical students in their care. According to Magrane et al one such factor is privacy³. A majority of female patients were found to be more likely to refuse examination of intimate body parts by medical students.

Generally, research has shown that medical students are well accepted by patients⁴. However, there is little knowledge regarding patients' perception and attitude in

particularly two different areas – urban and suburban hospital settings. This study was designed to study the factors that influence a patient’s perception and attitude towards medical students in two different hospital settings; Hospital Kuala Lumpur (urban) and Hospital Kulim (suburban). The hypothesis was that patients in Hospital Kuala Lumpur are more positive towards medical students than patients in Hospital Kulim.

Method

This is a cross sectional study that was conducted in two public hospitals with different settings, Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL), an urban hospital and Hospital Kulim, a suburban hospital. A total of 213 patients were interviewed; 149 patients from HKL and 49 patients from Hospital Kulim. Respondents were randomly selected from in-patients of Medical, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Orthopaedics and Surgery departments from both hospitals. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using a newly-designated questionnaire which was prepared in dual language (English and Malay). A five-point Likert scale was used to assess the patients’ responses. Data was analysed using SPSS version 21.0 statistical software. Pearson’s chi-square test Student’s T-test.

Results

Demographic data

A total of 213 patients participated in the survey. Among all patients interviewed, 70% (n=149) patients were from HKL and 30% (n=64) from HK. Out of these, 54.5% (n=116) of the respondents were male and 45.5% (n=97) were female. The distribution of their age was 7.5% (n=16) <20 years, 22.5% (n=48) 21-30 years, 17.4% (n=37) 31-40 years, 16% (n=34) 41-50 years and 36.6% (n=78) >50 years. More than half of the patients which is 51.6% (n=110) had secondary education, 27.2% (n=58) had primary education, 18.3% (n=39) had tertiary education, while 2.8% (n=6) had no formal education.

Attitude towards medical student

Patients from HK had more positive attitude towards medical student compared to patients from HKL (mean Likert score=3.65/5). However, Table 1 shows that there was no significant difference between hospital settings and patient’s attitude (p>0.05). Most of the patients agree to allow the presence of medical students during clinical examination which were 85.9% (n=128) and 70.3% (n=45) respectively. Same finding can be seen with patients accepting the involvement of medical student during their clinical examination, majority of the patients from HKL and

Table 1: Differences between Patient’s Attitude towards Medical Students in Urban and Suburban Hospital Settings

| Group | N | Mean | Test | p value |
|--------|-----|------------|-------------------|---------|
| HKL | 149 | 18.14±2.45 | T test t=1.101 | 0.272 |
| HKulim | 64 | 18.56±2.81 | | |

Table 2 Patient’s Attitude towards Medical Students in Two Hospital Settings (% of patients)

| Items | Hospital Kuala Lumpur | Hospital Kulim |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| Patient allows the presence of medical students during clinical examination | | |
| Strongly disagree | 0(0.0) | 0(0.0) |
| Disagree | 10(6.7) | 4(6.3) |
| Neutral | 6(4.0) | 1(1.6) |
| Agree | 128(85.9) | 45(70.3) |
| Strongly disagree | 5(3.4) | 14(21.9) |
| Patient allows the involvement of medical students during clinical examination | | |
| Strongly disagree | 0(0.0) | 2(3.1) |
| Disagree | 21(14.1) | 5(7.8) |
| Neutral | 6(4.0) | 1(1.6) |
| Agree | 116(77.9) | 47(73.4) |
| Strongly agree | 6(4.0) | 9(14.1) |

Table 3: Association between Patient's Attitude and Other Variables

| Variables | Attitude | | X ² value | p value |
|---|--|--|----------------------|---------|
| | Positive | Negative | | |
| Hospital settings HKL HKulim | 59(63.4) 34(36.6) | 90(75.0) 30(25.0) | 3.331 | 0.068 |
| Gender Male Female | 59(63.4) 34(36.6) | 57(47.5) 63(52.5) | 5.368 | 0.021 |
| Education Illiterate Primary Secondary Tertiary | 3(3.2) 25(26.9) 51(54.8) 14(15.1) | 3(2.5) 33(27.5) 59(49.2) 25(20.8) | 1.388 | 0.708 |
| Occupation Not working/student Non professional Semi professional Professional | 27(29.0) 34(36.6) 23(19.2) 12(10.0) | 48(40.0) 37(30.8) 20(21.5) 12(12.9) | 2.839 | 0.417 |
| Status Single Married Widow | 15(16.1) 71(76.3) 7(7.5) | 26(21.7) 90(75.0) 4(3.3) | 2.631 | 0.268 |

HK agree which were 77.9% (n=116) and 73.4% (n=47) respectively (Table 1).

From Table 3, we can observe that the variables of there were no significant association between patient's age, race, education level, occupation and marital status with their attitude ($p > 0.05$). Only patient's gender had significant difference with their attitude ($p < 0.05$). Female patients (52.5%, n=63) appeared to be less receptive towards medical students compared to male patients (47.5%, n=57).

Discussion

The Mean Likert score from this study was 3.65/5. This study revealed that there were no significant differences in patients' perception and attitude towards medical students from urban hospital and suburban hospital. Generally both hospitals showed that patients have positive acceptance toward medical students. There were slight differences between number of respondents who believes that they have the right to turn down medical students in HKL and Hospital Kulim. The most common reasons given by the respondents to allow the involvement of medical students in their care were to encourage students to participate in learning because they believed that medical should be given a chance to have better experience. However, there were a large proportion of the female respondents from both hospitals responded that they

felt uncomfortable interacting with the opposite gender without any supervision and agree they felt better if the supervisor was present. Vice versa, majority of the male respondents have neutral feeling interacting with the opposite gender with or without the supervisor.

This is the first ever study of its kind being conducted in Malaysia to study the perception and attitude of patients towards medical students in urban and suburban hospital settings. We believe that the interactions between patients and medical students are key ingredients to formulating quality medical education. The study was able to quantitatively measure patients' perception and attitude towards medical students. At first, it is expected that the patient refusal rate would be much higher in Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL) which is situated in an urban area compared to Hospital Kulim (HK) which is in a suburban area. The reason to this phenomenon is unclear. However it could be attributed to the fact that the demographic data of patients from both hospitals are strikingly similar. Another rationale is that although HK is a suburban hospital it has already been a teaching hospital for medical students for years. This characteristic of HK may be the reason that masked what defines a suburban hospital resulting in no significant differences between the two hospitals.

Generally, the attitude of patients from both HKL and HK are positive. The majority of patients (90.1%) agree to allow

the presence of medical students during clinical examination. Our results agree with another research⁵, where patient's attitude towards the presence of medical students in family practice consultation was studied. A majority of patients cited "to encourage students to learn better" as the most common reason for allowing the presence of medical students. Only a minority objected to the presence of medical students and the most common reason being violation of privacy.

A majority of patients also agree to allow the involvement of medical students in their care. Our results correspond with York NL et al⁶ study in 1995. Most of the patients expressed a positive desire to contribute to the education process of medical students and the majority feel that medical students should be given a chance to learn. A large proportion of patients feel that cooperating well with medical students is able to help them learn better. While some believe that the involvement of medical students in their care will only make them better doctors in the future.

A minority of patients feel that medical students repeat what have been done before by medical officers therefore rejecting medical students' involvement in their care. Most of the patients did not have any objections having medical students performing physical examination and minor procedures such as drawing blood which is accordance with another study done by Santen SA et al⁷.

It is also important to know that most patients prefer to have prior information regarding the presence of medical students during clinical consultation. Patients feel that they have the right to know about the role of medical students and this will allow them to be more comfortable and willing to participate in medical education⁸. Another aspect that is highly appreciated by patients and often taken granted by medical students is a well informed consent. Many patients believe that a well informed consent will be able to help them interact with medical students without any hidden barriers or concern³.

The main factors cited by patients as being important in determining their attitudes towards the presence of medical students during consultations were their gender. While many of the male patients we interviewed do not mind that medical students examine their private parts, it is not the same for female patients particularly those warded in obstetrics and gynaecology wards. A significant number of female patients felt embarrassed when medical students examine their genitalia⁹.

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Conclusion

This study shows no significant differences between patient's attitude in urban and suburban hospital settings toward medical students. The perception and attitude of patients towards medical students are positive in both Hospital Kuala Lumpur and Hospital Kulim. However, medical students and clinical supervisors need to have better understanding of patient's preference when students are involved in patients' care.

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