

BEME Spotlight 32

A BEME systematic review of UK undergraduate medical education in the general practice setting

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Review website

<http://bemecollaboration.org/Published+Reviews/BEME+Guide+No+32/>

Keywords

General practice, medical education, systematic review, undergraduate medical education

Headline conclusions

- Medical students in their first clinical year learned clinical skills as well or better in general practice compared with hospital settings
- Students receive more teaching and feedback from general practice tutors compared with that received from hospital tutors during placements
- Patient satisfaction and enablement is not affected by the student's presence, but patients may experience lower relational empathy with their GPs
- Students described several cognitive, emotional and behavioural benefits to learning in a general practice setting (e.g. gaining an understanding of the socio-cultural environment of illness, gaining confidence in clinical skills, and receiving feedback from general practice tutors), however, described dis-benefits included isolation and less patient contact
- Patients involved in general practice teaching experienced personal gain and a sense of altruism, but also described feeling anxious, embarrassed and objectified
- GPs have a powerful role as broker of the interactions between patients and students
- General practice is a socio-cultural and developmental learning space where students can make links between disease-specific learning and whole-person medicine.
- Students are negotiating the competing cultures between hospital and general practice settings during their training
- Patients are transient members of the learning community. Their role and involvement in the teaching community requires careful facilitation

Background and context

General practice is increasingly used as a learning environment in undergraduate medical education in the UK. The aim of this project was to identify, summarise and synthesise research about undergraduate medical education in general practice in the UK.

Review objectives

The aim of this project was to identify, summarise and synthesise empirical research evidence on delivering undergraduate medical education in general practice in the United Kingdom to maximise the impact of existing research and to shape future research in this area. The main review questions were as follows:

1. What learning activities have been reported to happen in undergraduate general practice teaching in the United Kingdom terms of:
 - a. Learning objectives and content?
 - b. Duration, structure and timing of placements?
2. Which professional groups are involved in teaching undergraduate medical education in general practice?
3. What learning and practice outcomes have been demonstrated for students, teachers and patients in the domains of cognitive; behavioural; and emotional change or learning as a result of undergraduate placements in general practice?
4. What do students, teachers and patients perceive to be the benefits and dis-benefits of undergraduate medical education in general practice?
5. What are the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of placements described or evaluated within the empirical literature?
6. What costs of undergraduate teaching in general practice have been described?

Review methodology

Search Strategy: In order to identify relevant research in this area we systematically searched electronic databases using relevant search terms to identify empirical studies of undergraduate medical education within a general practice setting in the UK from 1990 onwards.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Empirical studies of undergraduate medical education within a general practice setting in the United Kingdom were included. We excluded studies conducted outside of the UK, or published prior to 1990.

Data Extraction: We conducted three levels of data extraction to inform a descriptive summary, an in-depth quantitative study and an in-depth qualitative study. All included papers were summarised in a descriptive report of all included studies. We then categorised these papers to determine their inclusion in two in-depth syntheses. Firstly, papers using quantitative measures were considered for an in-depth analysis if they used a comparative group and an objective outcome measure. We conducted an in-depth quality assessment adapted from the Maryland Scientific Methods Score and data extraction of these comparative, quantitative and objective outcome measure papers to inform a focussed assessment of the effect and impact of general practice teaching. Secondly, papers using qualitative methodology were quality assessed to determine inclusion in a meta-ethnography of qualitative papers looking at the patient and student experience of participating in general practice learning.

Data Synthesis: All included papers were summarized in a descriptive study of the literature. Results for the quantitative studies were considered under three main headings:

- Is there a difference between learning outcomes in general practice placements compared to hospital placements amongst undergraduate medical students?
 - Why might general practice placements affect learning outcomes compared to hospital placements?
 - Does student presence affect patient satisfaction or enablement in general practice?
- Papers using qualitative methodology were quality assessed for inclusion in a meta-ethnography of the student and patient experiences of taking part in undergraduate medical education. This in-depth synthesis facilitated an understanding of learning within this particular context, as well as emerging theories from the qualitative data.

Implications for practice

- Teaching in general practice settings is valued by students, patients and GP tutors
- Patients may feel embarrassed, anxious or objectified in teaching consultations. These feelings can be minimised when a GP welcomes patients into the social community of the teaching encounter
- There are a number of practical ways in which a GP can facilitate the active participation of students and patients in a teaching consultation and minimise power hierarchies
- Students need support and guidance when negotiating the different cultures across teaching and learning environments

Review methodology

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