



Medical and Health Professional Education
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BEME Spotlight 35

A critical hybrid realist-outcomes systematic review of relationships between medical education programs and communities

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Review website

<http://bemecollaboration.org/Published+Reviews/BEME+Guide+No+35/>

Keywords

Community, relationship, community-engaged, community-oriented, community-based, health professions education, systematic review

Headline conclusions

- This two-armed systematic review combined standard outcomes criteria (Kirkpatrick levels) and realist methods.
- The review identified the heterogeneity of relationships between medical education programs and communities, the polysemic use of the concept of community, and the acritical and atheoretical basis of much of the literature on medical school-community relationships.
- Despite the shortcomings of this literature, the review identified much enthusiasm, creativity, and hope expressed through the many kinds of relationships described in the literature reviewed.
- Many things seemed to provide value in the context of these relationships, even if it was not always clear why or how or to whom the benefit accrued (or could accrue).
- Perceptions of community and the value of community in the context of medical education are likely to continue to be contested. However, the review has suggested ways in which shared, objective, and comprehensive ways of modeling these relationships could be developed.

Background and context

The relationships between medical schools and communities have long inspired and troubled medical education programs. Successive models of community-oriented, community-based and community-engaged medical education have promised much but have not always delivered on those promises.

Although there has been much discussion of the role of community relationships in the medical education literature, it is hard to identify what constitutes good practice, or what works in different circumstances. There have been systematic reviews that included the concept of community relationships in medical education, but there have been no reviews that critically considered the nature and expression of these relationships alongside the impacts they have on different stakeholders.

Review objectives

Review question: "How do different relationships between medical education programs and communities impact educational and health outcomes?"

Review objectives:

- identify published empirical and non-empirical evidence of the impact of community-based, oriented and engaged medical education, and to analyse this evidence.
- synthesise empirical and non-empirical analyses to identify how different relationships with host communities impact medical education, identifying key factors, dependencies and their contextual binding.
- identify the strengths and limitations of the research effort to date, establish the current strengths and weaknesses of the way the construct of community is linked to and accounted for in medical education and to identify objectives for future research.

Review methodology

Search Strategy: The literature search involved four components: a structured search of Medline, ERIC, Web of Science and CINAHL; a bibliography from a pilot search; hand searches of key journals and books and other non-indexed sources; and reviewer recommendations arising from their reviews.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: The titles and abstracts of each candidate article (from all four sources) were screened and items were eliminated if they did not cover all three concepts of healthcare, education, and community. All items were then entered in to the realist arm of the study. A further screen was carried out so that only items involving some kind of empirical study were entered into the outcomes arm of the study.

Data Extraction: The review was undertaken using a purpose-built online system. Reviewers volunteered to undertake outcomes, or realist, or both kinds of reviews. Sets of papers were randomly allocated to reviewers. Reviewers completed an online pro forma for each review. Data from each review was stored in the online system. 38 reviewers from around the world completed 489 realist reviews and 271 outcomes reviews; 334 articles were reviewed in the realist arm and 181 in the outcomes arm.

Implications for practice

Medical school - community relationships can provide a rich context for running educational programs and individual educational activities, often with a service component. These may be an addition to or an alternative to offerings from academic health science centres.

However, there is a clear need for common and objective approaches to modeling and reporting medical school – community relationships to allow for a more direct exploration of what works for whom and in what contexts. At present the area is too heterogeneous and divergent to afford that kind of detailed synthesis.

These relationships and their impacts and benefits should be considered from the points of view of all stakeholders, in particular from those of the communities and their members, who often seem to have been disregarded.