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PRIORITIZING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE ARMENIAN UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Physicians' strong communication skills increase patient adherence to treatment plans, lead to improved treatment outcomes, and contribute to higher levels of satisfaction with their healthcare experience. However, there still persist several barriers and challenges which complicate effective communication, such as language differences, cultural diversity, and time constraints. Undergraduate medical education is the basic system for the development of future healthcare professionals.

This review article aims to elucidate communication skills teaching, learning and assessment peculiarities in modern medical education. It addresses existing barriers, proposes strategies for improvement, and suggests ways to overcome challenges in educating communication skills. By exploring various frameworks, models, and teaching strategies, it provides insights into how communication skills can be effectively integrated into current medical curricula. Special attention is given to the Armenian context.

In the Republic of Armenia, undergraduate level medical professions are regulated by a number of laws, regulations, and instruments, including: the law of Armenia on higher and postgraduate education, the listed higher education level specialties, Armenian national qualifications framework, and the "Medicine" sectoral qualifications framework. The latter two instruments cover graduates' knowledge and competency that outline communication skills as one of the key competencies. However, Armenian higher education institutions providing medical education have varying medical graduates' competences lists.

Integrating communication skills training into medical curricula is imperative to adequately equipping future physicians with necessary competences. Formalization of communication skills teaching, learning and especially assessment with the use of structured frameworks in Armenian undergraduate medical education system will obviously improve medical graduates' communication skills. An additional supra-institutional regulation instrument which describes a detailed list of essential skills and competencies for undergraduate medical professionals and centralized State licensure examinations for medical graduates in Armenia could be a promising solution.

KEYWORDS: communication skills, effective communication, doctor-patient communication, undergraduate medical education, medical curriculum, educational framework, qualification framework.

INTRODUCTION

Providing effective patient care requires a holistic approach that extends beyond diagnosing and treating the patient alone. It necessitates that doctors possess not only medical knowledge and clinical competencies but also strong communication skills. Research indicates that physicians' strong verbal, non-verbal,

"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."

RUDYARD KIPLING

and para-verbal communication skills increase patient adherence to treatment plans, lead to improved treatment outcomes, and contribute to higher levels of satisfaction with their healthcare experience [Joyce B et al., 2010; Ranjan P et al., 2015; Mohd

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