A modern integrated curriculum in the College of Medicine of Hawler Medical University: A unique experience that needs collaborative efforts

Editorial

The need for improving medical education has become worldwide concern. Several international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) encourage all countries to undertake reform in medical education. In responding to these challenges, medical schools around the world managed to modify their curriculum and various curricular innovations have been adopted by medical schools worldwide. Classical medical curriculum has been criticized by many authors for many reasons including, clear and artificial separation between basic and clinical sciences, curriculum overload, lack of integration between preclinical and clinical subjects, didactic, too much compartmentalization of the student’s knowledge and reliance heavily on bedside setting, providing students with unnecessary information for the doctors during their practical life, irrelevant information to student's future career, and students' passivity in the process with inadequate assessment methods. The first medical college in Iraqi Kurdistan region, Hawler College of Medicine, was established in 1977 and adopted the Edinburgh curriculum like all other medical colleges in Iraq. The classical six-year program in the college is based on a curriculum that is mainly based on a traditional, didactic teaching. The first three years are called "preclinical years" primarily cover the basic medical sciences with two clinical subjects. In the following three years, students start their clinical courses where they interact with patients in different hospitals under tutor supervision. Many steps have been implemented at the level of college to raise the standards and the quality of the curriculum including implementing small group teaching experience in the 4th and 5th study years, provision of different audio-teaching supplies to basic science laboratories, implementation of OSCE approach in the evaluation process of students, provision of different teaching equipment and facilities to side room in the teaching hospitals, application of research process in the fourth study year, establishment of clinical skills lab, enhancement of better students self learning process through provision of internet facilities, electronic library and provision of updated medical literatures and introduction of communication skills and medical ethics in the syllabus of third study year. Through a mutual collaboration between Hawler Medical University and Dundee University from the UK, the college started to implement a new integrated curriculum in 2013 both horizontally between subjects and vertically between basic sciences and clinical sciences. For this purpose, a curriculum development committee was established in the college to supervise the process. The integrated curriculum will be implemented in the next academic year 2014-2015 in the first year of study and will be followed by next year of study each year. The college will also try to implement different teaching methods which lead to acquisition of knowledge and skills rather than just memorizing information like small group learning, seminars, self-study and core clinical problems. New assessment methods will also be used to assess knowledge and skills of the students. Implementing a new approach in any field and changing management in general are
not easy tasks as they need a lot of preparations and might face resistance from different stakeholders; fortunately, this new and unique experience of implementing integrated curriculum in Hawler College of Medicine is well supported by the higher management of Hawler Medical University. The positive and encouraging role of the University Presidency in supporting the whole process was very essential to initiate this process and to have a smooth implementation. The President of the University was of great help in this process through his continuous guidance and follow up for obtaining the administrative approval from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. However, this initiative still needs the support, hard work and enthusiasm of the faculty staff and students to be a successful and life changing experience and to be a successful model for the other medical schools in the region and the country.

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