

Attitude and Communication skills (ATCOM): The need of the hour...

What is ATCOM?

It refers to Attitude and Communication competencies for Indian medical graduate.

The overall goal of undergraduate medical education programme (GMR 2012) is to create an “Indian Medical Graduate” (IMG) possessing requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and responsiveness, so that he or she may function appropriately and effectively as a physician of first contact of the community while being globally relevant.

In order to achieve this goal, IMG has to function appropriately and effectively in her/his roles and acquire required competencies and moral responsibilities. As per MCI, the domains of attitude, communication and ethics needs to be taught directly and explicitly throughout the undergraduate curriculum.

Is it really needed to teach attitude and communication skills to medical students? - Yes it is needed, let us think why?

Present generation students:

Today's generation students are technically advancing but are poor in moral responsibilities.

Students take selfie with cadavers and post as - feeling awesome/great/excited on social media, a postgraduate student posts on facebook, a photo of a surgery done/assisted by him with a title as ' My first surgery, very thrilling... and so on. In another instance, a facebook post of a resident had a photo of neck swelling being examined at a medial camp, with the face of the subject completely displayed – there is no regard for patient autonomy.

Are these students to be blamed or not?

We cannot blame the present generation, because after all they are adolescents of age 17-18 years. Many of these students enter the medical school with or without any background knowledge of ethics, morality and human values. A separate class was dedicated for moral science during yester years, which is lacking now-can we give a second thought here? Even moral story telling by parents and grandparents is very scarce in today's digital world. Coming from this background, how can we expect students entering medicine to have

proper moral behaviour on all aspects and particularly towards cadavers and patients?

But on the other hand, they are very smart, they will run after teacher who is a true facilitator and bunk classes where there is no learning.

Would teaching attitude & communication (ATCOM) help us tackle these issues?? Perhaps Yes. We can hope so.

Present generation teachers:

Book oriented teaching by the teachers. They are not interested to teach them any ethical issues or discipline. They only teach knowledge. They take for granted that students are already professionals and they know how to behave.

All children (students) observe seniors and teachers and the students follow them.

If we as teachers are punctual and give respect to cadaver, patients and communicate properly, the students would also follow the same. It is true that, WHAT YOU DO; SO YOUR STUDENTS WOULD ALSO DO...

Sadly, many a times we set bad examples for students by not giving respect to patients or cadavers. One cannot expect the students to realize their mistakes if teachers themselves aren't aware of them.

First, teachers should be given training regarding this. MCI made it mandatory for all the medical faculty to undergo MET workshop but sadly many of the teachers feel it a WASTAGE OF TIME and the attendance rate of such programs organised by MEU, is VERY POOR (even PG program).

We cannot deny our responsibility. Proper counselling of students is very much essential in every step of their life parallel to medical teaching. Education and Morality/ Ethics are the two wings of Medical sciences.

How can we help the students to develop good or positive attitude?

We should work for students, stand by students, mentor in day to day activities and so its our job/effort to make them understand things right or wrong their way/in a style which is very well accepted by them.

But in view of reduced faculty by MCI, many faculty have the opinion that it's difficult to achieve the

goal of effective reinforcement of moral, ethical and professional behaviours to impart for all the students (especially when students are more and teachers are less). The decline will affect the morals and ethics more than the academics. Academics can survive by the explosion of information available and the ease of accessing it in today's digital world; what will not be available in the digital age will be of faculty who can really live up to the role model status; what cannot be learnt from such compromised and indifferent faculty will be the Humanities and Ethics of being a Doctor.

Our role as teacher depends upon our motivational capacity. In ancient times, Indian gurus kept their followers completely engaged in controlled thinking. Putting them under many challenging circumstances and taught them how to tackle them keeping in mind the morals of life. ATCOM is one such motivational tool for the teachers to be a good mentor for their pupil. Our lectures should mix life and science together with a flavour of humanity, rather than mandatory cause-effect and clinico-pathological discourse. Let us try slowly to transform ourselves before setting our students in motion.

ATCOM is a training Module. It provides orientation for the trainers about how to go about in teaching and assessing attitude and communication competencies to medical professionals. Modules are spread throughout the course. It is hoped that the successful implementation of the ATCOM modules will be a forerunner of the transition to competency based medical education(CBME) program envisaged by the Medical Council of India.

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