

The Voice of Patients in Shaping our Future Doctors – A Qualitative Evaluation of Patients’ and Student-users’ Experience

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INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT:

- Clinical interpersonal and problem-solving skills are core competencies for effective and patient-centred care; Their proficiency requires repetitive practice with authentic patient contact and timely feedback.
- An increasing class size, limited access to hospital wards and clinics and the growing importance of teleconsultation prompted urgently for an innovative and sustainable approach to build learners’ skills and confidence in conducting effective, empathic, patient-centred consultations in a safe virtual learning environment

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

- The “living library of patient-educators” was piloted among HKU-MBBS-IV students in January 2022. 18 patients with common symptoms encountered in primary care were trained as “patient-educators” to:
 - Give a history of their own illnesses in a standardized manner during a mock consultation with students over video-conferencing platform
 - Assess students’ interpersonal skill from patient’s perspective
 - Provide individualized constructive feedback.

STUDY AIM: To explore the experiences of patient-educators and student-users with this project.

METHODS

All patient-educators, and 13 students who used the library purposively sampled by frequency of library use, were invited to participate in focus group interviews via WhatsApp and/or email between May-August 2022. Each group consisted of 2-5 participants, led by an experienced researcher, and lasted for 50-80 minutes. All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and independently reviewed by 2 investigators to identify recurrent themes using thematic analysis. Inconsistencies were resolved by discussion between the investigators.

Interview guide

	Patient-educators	Student-users
1.	How has your experience been as a patient-educator in this project?	How has your experience been as a student in this project?
2.	How did you become a patient-educator?	Why did you decide to use the patient-educator library?
3.	How did you prepare for the sessions?	How did you prepare for the sessions?
4.	Can you share a memorable student interaction that you had?	Can you share with us some examples of feedback you received from the patient-educators?
5.	In your opinion, how did the project help our medical students, and our community?	
6.	How can this project be improved for the future?	How can this project be improved for the future?

RESULTS

7 interviews were conducted (4 for 14 patient-educators; 3 for 10 student-users), where 4 main themes were constructed.

Sharing own experiences:

“I would like to share my own experience with the medical students, to let them learn how to understand the natural history of a medical condition, something which one cannot learn from books but from conversing with a patient... Also, the more students I met, the more I understand what the students did not know or, were missing out on.... Indeed, I am also learning and I am enjoying the process.” (Patient-educator #A1)

Benefits of the patient-educator library

- Offered students valuable and convenient opportunities to practice consultation skills in Cantonese with a variety of patients in a safe and low stress environment and to understand patient’s perspectives
- Students: allow trial of different consultation styles, help to prepare for examination
- Patient-educators: contribute to the community through experience sharing

Helpful to receive feedback – patient-centredness:

“... can receive feedback from the patients, and to understand what they want us to pay attention to. Sometimes it’s not just about the physical problems they’re experiencing, but also some psychological issues that are hidden from the conversation that we have to discover on our own” (Student #10)

Qualities of good patient-educators

- Compassion, openness in sharing, good communication and time management skills

Feedback – strengths and weaknesses:

“I really get like the first hand and very honest feedback from the patients... told me what I was good at and what I was not really good at...” (Student #Y)

Importance of feedback – content and provision

- Students: helpful to know own strengths and weaknesses in order to reflect on how to improve
- Patient-educators: valuable for students but, giving immediate constructive feedback could be stressful (e.g. lack of experience, insufficient time, selection)

Operation considerations

- Students: convenient, wish to expand this project throughout the curriculum (i.e. more cases, for different clerkships)
- Patient-educators: more cases to ensure variety (i.e. exposure)

Convenience:

“... it’s really convenient for us to take history, because we basically don’t need to worry about travel time but to stay at zoom. If I had the opportunity, I would just try as many as possible until I feel like I’m confident with the [history taking] skill. (Student #8)

Feedbacks from patient’s perspective:

“I think patients’ feedback are very valuable [for students]. It’d be totally different from teaching of a professor. Therefore I think this project is very worthwhile” (Patient educator #C1)

More cases needed:

“... the benefits of this project could be greater if there could be more participants, so that the students could contact different types of people, with different ages and different spectrums of conditions...” (Patient educator #B2)

CONCLUSION

Both student-users and patient-educators had positive experience with the patient-educator library:

- ✓ **Students:** valuable opportunities to practice consultation skills in a convenient environment, receive patients’ feedback on own skills
 - ✓ **Patient-educators:** sense of achievement, that they had contributed to the society by improving our future medical doctors’ skill
- Involvement of “Patient-Educators” in medical education is feasible and beneficial to both the learners and the patients.**

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