

# Medical and physiotherapy undergraduates' perception on the importance of roles and qualities of a medical teacher

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## Abstract

**Introduction & Objectives:** Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka conducts MBBS and BSc physiotherapy degree programs following SPICES model where educators have to play diverse roles in order to fulfil their responsibilities. Looking at them from a student's perspective will help understand what students perceive as important roles of educators and help the students understand the educators' different capacities. An effective medical educator possesses a range of qualities. Looking at them from students' point of view indicates what they expect from teachers as professionals.

**Methods:** Harden and Crosby (2000) paper on 12 roles of a medical teacher was the conceptual framework for this study. Based on previous literature a questionnaire was developed with 20 different roles and 15 qualities of an educator. Study followed an analytical cross-sectional design with participation of 188 physiotherapy and medical undergraduates.

**Results:** Study findings indicated that the students' perception on importance of different roles of teachers had a close overlap with Harden's 12 roles. Information provider as a lecturer in class room in clinical settings, in practical settings, developing learning materials for lectures, clinical educators etc. Importance of being an examiner and curriculum planner was rated relatively low by students. Students perceived good communication skills, professional skills, knowledge and respect for patients as most important qualities in an educator.

**Conclusion:** Findings will help educators understand what learners expect from them and help students understand the different capacities of educators.

**Keywords:** *12 Roles of a Medical Teacher; Ideal Medical Teacher; Student Perception; Survey*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of teaching is to facilitate personal growth and development that impact the professional, social and political aspects of learners (Galbraith, 2004). Since global trend of medical education is moving towards a more humanistic approach to patient care, medical teachers need to become educators, interacting with individual students (McLean, 2001).

Faculty of Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka conducts a 5 year MBBS degree programme and a 4 year BSc. Physiotherapy degree programme. Both programmes follow innovative student-centred curricula and incorporate features of SPICES model in their teaching. This context involves diverse learners, various teaching

methods and a range of teaching settings. This student-centred learning environment expects the teachers to guide the learners with diverse abilities, knowledge and different levels of comprehension towards self-directed study. In order to fulfil their responsibilities in this context teachers have to play a variety of roles.

Harden and Crosby (2000) have identified that with rapid changes in medical education the role of the medical teacher is changing. They have identified 12 roles of the medical teacher falling into six categories.

According to Cross (1995) discrepant perceptions of roles and behaviours in clinical education may have an adverse effect on student learning. So it is important that

students should have an understanding of different roles of the teacher and the faculty should understand the students' perception on the different roles of a medical educator and how the students perceive the importance of different roles to them as undergraduates.

Successful completion of these demanding and complex roles requires teachers to possess a range of professional and personal qualities. Different studies have identified a variety of characteristics as the best qualities in a medical educator. Looking at them from a student's point of view will help understand what students perceive as being important and what they expect from their teachers as educators and medical professionals.

The findings of this study will help students understand the different capacities of educators and how to get the maximum aid from their educators in these different capacities. Findings will also help the educators understand what learners expect from them as teachers and medical professionals.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Objectives of this study were to:

1. Identify the medical and physiotherapy undergraduates' perception on importance of different roles of a medical teacher.
2. Identify the medical and physiotherapy undergraduates' perception on important qualities in a medical teacher.
3. Compare the differences of students' perception regarding the importance of different roles in a medical teacher based on their academic year.
4. Compare the differences of students' perception regarding the importance of different roles in a medical teacher based on students' programme of study.

This study followed an analytical cross sectional study design; it was carried out in faculty of Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka. At a confidence interval of 95% and a 5 % margin of error the target sample was 300 undergraduates representing three academic years of the faculty.

A self-administered questionnaire with 20 roles and 15 qualities of a medical teacher was developed to collect the data. Harden's (2000) paper on 12 roles of a medical teacher was used as a conceptual frame to identifying the different roles of a medical teacher. Based on these 12 roles, 14 different roles of teachers were identified. To better suit the study setting and participants the learning facilitator role was re-categorized as facilitator of small

group discussions (SGD) and facilitator of problem based learning (PBL) sessions, role of clinical or practical teacher was divided as information provider in clinical settings and information provider in practical settings. Other 10 original roles of Harden's (2000) study were also included. Based on previous literature 6 more roles were added, as tutors, personal advisors, clinical educators, researchers, administrators and community health developers. Based on previous study findings, 15 important personal and professional qualities of a medical teacher were added to the questionnaire.

Students' perception was obtained through a likert scale, 5 being very important, 4, considerably important to 1 being not important. Participants marked the importance of roles and qualities according to their perception. Data was analysed using the 16th version of SPSS. First and second objectives were analysed using descriptive analyses and third and fourth objectives were analysed using chi square.

## III. RESULTS

Total of 188 students participated in the study at a response rate of 62.67% representing three academic years of the faculty. Out of which 139 were MBBS undergraduates and 159 were females.

According to the responses, the students perceived following roles of medical teachers to be very important. Majority perceived the most important role of a teacher was being an information provider in clinical settings. Following roles are listed according to majority's perception of their importance:

- Information provider in practical settings
- Information provider as a lecturer in class room
- Clinical Educator
- Developing learning materials for lectures (Presentations/ handouts)
- On-the-job role model (Clinic/ward)
- Role model in teaching setting
- Learning facilitator in SGDs
- Learning facilitator in PBLs
- Examiner of formal examinations
- Curriculum Planner
- Curriculum Evaluator

The roles teachers' play as researchers, course organizers and resource developers were rated low by the students. Undergraduates' perceived that the least important role of a medical teacher is of an administrator. Being a mentor and a personal advisor were also rated as less important by the participants.

There was no statistically significant difference found in students' perception on different roles of a medical teacher based on the participants' academic year. No statistically significant difference was found in students' perception for majority of educators' roles; however physiotherapy undergraduates had a more positive perception towards educators' role as researchers and course organizers than MBBS undergraduates. Difference in perception was statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$ ).

Students perceived that the most important qualities of a medical teacher were having, good communication skills, knowledge, professional skills and humanistic approach to patient care. Having good knowledge in technology was rated as the quality with lowest importance and having honesty and integrity were also rated low by the participants.

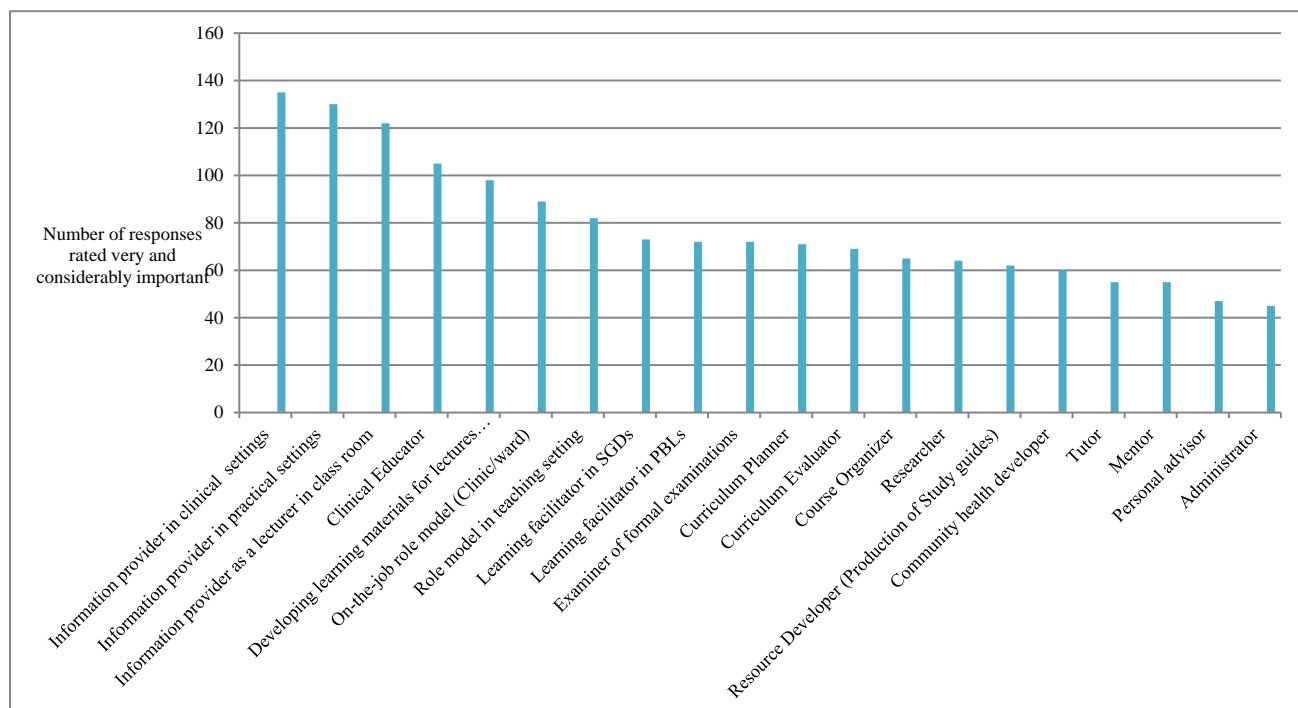


Figure 1: Undergraduates' Perceived Importance of Different Roles of a Medical Teacher

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Students' perception on importance of different roles of teachers had a close overlap with the 12 roles identified by Professor Harden (2000). However, students didn't perceive the roles of being a mentor, course organizer, and resource material developer (study guides) as being important as Harden (2000) found. This might be due to the fact that students don't get an opportunity to observe educators in these roles at the faculty and the responsibilities they have in these roles. Even though these roles have a strong impact on the curriculum and curriculum development educators don't directly contact with students through these roles so the students might not perceive their importance as much as the faculty does.

Educators can play an important role as a mentor and a personal advisor to the students in their personal and professional lives. However students had rated both these roles as not being "very important" roles of a medical teacher. Can this be due to the fact that the students have not observed their educators in these roles frequently and

closely? It may also be due to the fact that with the cultural and social factors involved in the Sri Lankan educational and clinical settings students are not familiar with seeking advice from their educators on personal issues.

Students had identified many of the qualities in the questionnaire as being "very important" for a medical teacher to have. However following medical ethics, honesty and integrity were ranked relatively low by the students. It is an interesting observation and the reasons for this should be identified.

Physiotherapy undergraduates had a more positive perception towards educators' role as researchers and course organizers than MBBS undergraduates. This could be due to better student to staff ratio in the Physiotherapy training program. The Physiotherapy program has only 30 students per intake every year whereas MBBS program has 200 students in each intake. Therefore the physiotherapy students have more opportunity to work closely with their educators getting

more exposure to their teachers involved in variety of different teaching roles as course organizers and researchers than the MBBS students.

## V. CONCLUSION

Findings indicate that the participants understand that teachers play a range of important roles other than being just a teacher. They had also identified that to fulfil these roles educators need to possess a range of personal and professional qualities.

Findings from this study will help students understand the different capacities of educators and will also help educators understand what learners expect from them as medical professionals. This will lead to better student-teacher interactions.

## Notes on Contributors

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## Ethical Approval

The approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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