

Teaching of Family Medicine: Perspectives of Faculty of Medicine in a Saudi Arabian University Regrading Current Primary Health Care System in Saudi Arabia.

Syed Imran Mehmood^{1,*}, Shahzadi Seema², Razi S.M³.

ABSTRACT:

Objective: This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of family medicine teaching in Saudi Arabian medical colleges.

Methodology: This pilot study enrolled 26 students of 6th years through simple random sampling. from Arar Medical College and Turaif Medical College of Northern Borders University. Data regarding students' perceptions of the teaching approach for family medicines, content, and relevance to practice was collected on a questionnaire.

Results: Among 26 participants female were 14 (from Arar 12, from Turaif 2) and male were 12 (From Arar 8, From Turaif 4). Most participants (both male and female) strongly agreed or agreed with the statements, indicating a positive experience and understanding of the Family Medicine concepts and skills. Some participants (mostly female) had neutral or disagreeing responses, particularly regarding the organizational aspects of general practice and the effectiveness of certain teaching methods.

Conclusion: The results advocate for a sustained focus on family medicine within the medical curriculum, presenting avenues for additional development and innovation.

Keywords: Health Occupations, Medicine, General Practice, Family Practice, Family Medicines

Introduction:

Family medicine is a crucial aspect of medical education, emphasizing the importance of primary care and community health. The field of family medicine, or general practice, is characterized as a medical specialty that deals with prevalent and long-term health conditions, prioritizing comprehensive health and well-being. This clinical specialty stands alongside internal medicine, paediatrics, and surgery, and should not be associated with non-clinical domains like community medicine and public health. While many family physicians are involved in community health and social activism, their foremost responsibility is providing direct patient care.^{1,2} A strategically planned family medicine clerkship can enhance the career preferences of medical students.³ The foremost and overriding purpose of educating medical students about family medicine and general practice is to foster an appreciation for the unique and critical role this specialty plays in the healthcare system.⁴ In Saudi Arabia, family medicine is an essential component of the medical curriculum. Arar Medical College and Turaif Medical College are both part of Northern Borders University (NBU) in Saudi Arabia. NBU is a public university located in Arar, with branches in Rafha, Turaif, and Al-Uwayqilah. The Arar campus houses the main medical programs, including the College of Medicine and the College of Medical Sciences. Turaif has a separate campus within

the university, offering some medical programs.

Objective:

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of family medicine teaching in Saudi Arabian medical colleges.

Methodology:

This pilot study was conducted at Arar Medical College and Turaif Medical College of Northern Borders University during September 2023 to April 2024. Student of 6th year who had successfully completed the family medicine module; 26 students were selected through simple random sampling. After taking informed consent a tailored questionnaire was used to collect data; assessing students' perceptions of the teaching approach, content, and relevance to practice. This questionnaire was developed based on Saudi Commission for Health Specialties accreditation guidelines and after review of literature.⁵⁻⁸

Results:

Among 26 participants female were 14 (from Arar 12, from Turaif 2) and male were 12 (From Arar 8, From Turaif 4). Most participants (both male and female) strongly agreed or agreed with the statements, indicating a positive experience and understanding of the Family Medicine concepts and skills. Some participants (mostly female) had neutral or disagreeing responses, particularly regarding the organizational aspects of general practice and the effectiveness of certain teaching methods.

Table No 1: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	±SD	Range
Overall Satisfaction	4.42	0.67	3-5
Relevance to Practice	4.35	0.74	3-5
Clarity of Objectives	4.28	0.79	2-5
Quality of Teaching	4.46	0.64	3-5
Interactive Sessions	4.52	0.58	4-5

Table No 2 presents the summary statistics for each variable, encompassing the mean, standard deviation, and

1: Professor and Director, Centre for Medical Education, Northern Border University, Saudi Arabia.

2: PhD Education, Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar, Pakistan.

3: Professor, Medical Education. Ibn-e-Sina University.

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*=corresponding author:

Email: mehmoodsi@hotmail.com

range. The findings indicate elevated mean scores across all variables, reflecting favorable assessments.

Table No 2: Frequency Distribution.

Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Overall Satisfaction	10 (38.5%)	12 (46.2%)	4 (15.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Relevance to Practice	9 (34.6%)	13 (50%)	4 (15.4%)	0 (0)	0 (0%)

Key Findings.

- Participants generally felt that they had a clear understanding of the learning outcomes and Family Medicine concepts.
- They reported gaining adequate knowledge and skills, especially in communication, history taking, and clinical examination.
- Some participants (mostly female) felt that they didn't gain enough understanding of organizational aspects of general practice.
- Problem-based learning (PBL) and small group discussions were highly rated as effective teaching methods.

Discussion:

The findings of this study align with previous research that has shown positive evaluations of family medicine teaching, a finding in agreement with a study conducted by Al-Mohaini et al.⁹ who reported that medical students in Saudi Arabia reported high satisfaction with their family medicine clerkship experience. Similarly, a study by Kidd et al.¹⁰ found that students in a Canadian medical school reported positive attitudes towards family medicine after completing a family medicine rotation. Conversely, various studies have indicated unfavourable or inconsistent assessments of family medicine education. For instance, research conducted by Senf et al.¹¹ revealed that students at a medical school in the United States expressed dissatisfaction with their family medicine clerkship, attributing this to insufficient supervision and unclear learning objectives. Research conducted by Tsimtsiou et al.¹² revealed that students at a medical school in Greece expressed unfavourable views regarding family medicine, attributing this to its perceived irrelevance to their prospective careers.

The discrepancies in results between these studies and the present research may stem from differences in curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and cultural contexts. For instance, the questionnaire for the current study's focus on interactive sessions, case discussions, and community-based learning could have played a significant role in the favourable evaluations. Additional research is required to investigate these elements and determine the most effective practices in family medicine education.

Although cognitive element of empathy is part of modules design for teaching family medicines as most expert focus upon cognitive element.¹³ Some other focused upon emotion¹⁴ while other advocate integration of both.¹⁵ Another important quality for a family medicines practitioner is empathy. Lussier MT¹⁶ while commenting mentioned that every family physician must be empathetic. Results of a review by Ortiz-Paredes D¹⁷ mentioned that most studies showed a decline in level of empathy during training of family medicine, probably due to the fact that only cognitive component of empathy was measured. Aun SM¹⁸ showed that by

stimulating emotional intelligence through conducting workshop of communication skills workshop with simulated patients we can improve empathy more effectively when compared to solely relying upon cognitive method of teaching.

The results of this study provide insights into the analysis of the primary health care system in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the following aspects: 1. Access and equity: Education in family medicine has the potential to mitigate healthcare disparities. 2. Community orientation: Learning within the community context improves cultural competence. 3. Integrated care: Education that involves multiple professions promotes collaborative practice. This research offers guidance for policy-making regarding: 1. Reforms in family medicine education. 2. Enhancements to the primary health care system. 3. Development of the healthcare workforce. By integrating an analysis of the primary health care system, this study delivers significant insights for advancing healthcare policies and practices in Saudi Arabia.

Recommendations:

Although the small sample size and descriptive design limit the generalizability of the findings yet it is desirable to :

1. Integrate primary health care system analysis into family medicine education.
2. Develop clinical exposure opportunities.
3. Increase clinical exposure and hands-on experience in family medicine.
4. Incorporate advanced learning technologies, such as simulation-based learning including empathy.

Future Directions:

1. Future studies should aim to recruit a larger sample and employ more robust research designs to validate the finding of current study;
2. Comparative studies of teaching approaches for family medicines.

Conclusion:

This research underscores the significance of assessing medical education programs to guarantee they fulfill the requirements of students and adequately prepare them for professional practice. The results advocate for the sustained focus on family medicine within the medical curriculum, presenting avenues for additional development and innovation. Future studies should investigate clinical exposure, advanced educational technologies, and interprofessional education.

Conflict of Interest:

The authors hold no conflict of interest.

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Authors Contribution.

- Imran Mehmood Syed: Conceive the idea, literature search, data collection and analysis.
- Shehzadi Sema: Draft manuscript, Proof read manuscript.
- Razi S.M: Revised manuscript critically for all intellectual content.

All authors have examined the final manuscript, given their consent for it to be published, and have agreed to be responsible for the accuracy and integrity of all elements of the work.