Students' role in the development of an "optional subjects-line" in a medical curriculum

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Student’s role* in the development of an “optional subjects-line” in a medical curriculum.

* indicated by yellow background colour

**Context**

  - Established content: no possibility of electives.
  - Possibility of continuous evolution through permanent reflection and evaluation.

- “Student’s Association on Education” (SWOP): coordinates all activities of students concerning medical education.

- Students experience a deficit: no formal opportunity to gain more in-depth knowledge on an individually chosen subject.

**Interventions and Results**

**Round-table meeting (April 2004):**

- Students and teachers reflect together on this topic.
- Difficult to decide what subjects can be optional.
- Introduce electives gradually.
- Start with 1 week of electives in the 5th year (1)
- Possibility to suggest own subjects (2)

13 different subjects were organized, most of them introducing new topics in the curriculum. (February 2005)

- “Tropical medicine” and “developmental psychology” were popular choices
- Other topics include: medical education, introduction to some surgical disciplines, InterDis, continuity of care in first line, …

**Evaluation (SWOP):**

- 67% response (n=111), very enthusiastic

**Community-oriented “health-education” project in a multicultural technical school in Ghent, organized by students. (October 2004)**

- Children were introduced in themes as “louses”, “first aid”, “menstruation and puberty”, …
- Students compiled a folder with teaching material. This can be used by other students in the future.
- Evaluation of knowledge and satisfaction of the children: organized by students themselves (n=40)
  - 79% of the answers on a little exam were correct
  - 93% of the children enjoyed the day very much (☺)

**Conclusions**

- If an encouraging environment is created, students can play an important role in improvement and permanent evaluation of medical curricula.
- The project we present is still in its infancy, is limited both in time and subjects and has many shortcomings. We work on the development of a complete ‘Exploration-continuum’, both deepening existing subjects and offering new topics.
- Electives give students the possibility to deepen their knowledge in particular fields and attribute a personal tinge to their education. This might enhance the motivation and involvement towards their studies and future profession.
- If some educational aim can be achieved through different ways, we believe one must seek to acknowledge these different ways in a curriculum. However, the most difficult step in organizing optional subjects seems “to opt for it.”

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