



HEALTH Attributes for Budding Health Care Professionals: A Need to Revisit Existing Curricula

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Abstract

The paper highlights the importance of Graduate Attributes of an Institution. **HEALTH Attributes** for health sciences include: **H**: Holistic approach with cultural competence; **E**: Empathy for fellow beings and patients; **A**: Academic Leadership; **L**: Effective Liasoning with proficient communication skills; **T**: Team-building and collaboration; **H**: Harness creativity and innovation with critical thinking. Institution should foster critical thinking among the budding professionals by way of evidence-based learning strategies. There is a dire need to formally adopt Peer-Assisted Learning in the curriculum. Delegative leadership style should be utilized for small group teaching-learning activities, including field visits. Curriculum Mapping should be a mandatory integral component in tune with stated graduate attributes. Every health science graduate should possess all-round qualities, making him / her, a “competent basic health care professional”. It would really be worthwhile to have uniformity in graduate attributes for health sciences, thereby having a structured strategy for evaluation of program outcomes.

Keywords: *HEALTH; Graduate; Attributes.*

Preamble

The fractured teacher-student and doctor-patient relationships are of serious concern for health science institutions today. Gone are the days, when we adored the Guru-Shishya model of teaching-learning, or when doctors were perceived by the community as an image of the Almighty. What went wrong? The University Grants Commission (UGC) in India has directed all Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the country to improve the graduate outcomes for students, enabling them to secure appropriate employment, training of students in professional and soft skills, along with quality assurance initiatives and accreditation ^[1].

The temples of teaching-learning have to cater to students of diverse backgrounds and intellect. Here lies the importance of Graduate Attributes of an Institution. These are the “qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These include, but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most University courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future” ^[2].

Context

Several Universities have their defined Graduate Attributes in place. The framework needs to be publicised adequately to all stakeholders, primarily, the students. Unfortunately, miscommunications, myths and lack of required leadership qualities and structured protocols in

certain cases, bring in incidents of violence and social stigmatization. Many facets of health care are not taught as a part of graduate training! The much-neglected affective domain of learning has turned out to be the most crucial part of treatment protocol. The false perception of a health care team comprising of only doctors takes a backseat and paves the way for true inter-disciplinary interactions. Students still feel burdened with a monotonous teaching-learning environment. Is there a communication gap between the students and facilitators? Are we expecting too much from students within the stipulated time frame? Are we sensitive to the differential learning needs of a diverse student community? These facts have triggered a need to revisit the existing academic curricula of health science programs. It is desirable that all health science institutions have a uniform Graduate Attributes framework, which would facilitate benchmarking of universities based on defined outcomes. This can be named as the HEALTH Graduate Attribute framework for health science graduates.

HEALTH Attributes for graduates of health sciences

H: Holistic approach with cultural competence

E: Empathy for fellow beings and patients

A: Academic Leadership

L: Effective Liasoning with proficient communication skills

T: Team-building and collaboration

H: Harness creativity and innovation with critical thinking

Holistic approach with empathy and effective liasoning

Compassion has been defined as the “sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it” [3]. The first principle of the American Medical Association Code of Ethics that states, “A physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical care, with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights” [4]. The Hippocratic Oath, mentions the importance of trustworthiness of the profession, compassion and human generosity in health care [5]. The outcomes are optimal when health care workers are treated with compassion by their organizations. Similarly, the patients respond in a better way when the clinician exhibits compassion towards him / her [6]. Good communication establishes an excellent rapport with an in-built element of mutual respect and trust between the health care professional and the patient.

Cultural Competence

Cultural Competence is the ability to understand, communicate and effectively interact with patients of diverse groups. It ensures equal access to health care for all communities as per their needs [7]. It is a set of coherent skills, knowledge and attitudes related to differential effects of treatment in diverse ethnic subsets, skills for dealing with cultural diversity and attitudes such as empathy, respect and sensitivity [8].

Academic leadership

Faculty needs to be effective role models, exhibiting correct leadership styles. Delegative leadership refers to transfer of decision-making powers to the subordinates, while being responsible for their decisions. This inevitably increases the cohesiveness and makes the learning process more enjoyable, with enhance student satisfaction. The crucial aspect of leadership development lies in the skills and behaviors required to work effectively with others [9].

Organizational capabilities with team-building and collaborative capacity

Professionals will be of diverse nature with different core competencies. Administrators and clinicians need to work as a team. This team-spirit needs to be ignited into the minds of budding health care professionals. It is important to emphasize the need to go beyond professional barriers into the community for meaningful and output-oriented collaborations.

Creativity and Innovation, with critical thinking

Given an opportunity, students come out with the finest of ideas to execute the most complicated plans. It is the responsibility of mentors to identify the “spark” and provide the necessary autonomy to enable him/her to showcase the innovative talent. Involvement of graduates in research activities promotes critical thinking.

Recommendations

- a. The academic and co-curricular activities should be aligned with the objective of attainment of stated program outcomes, within the framework of defined attributes.
- b. Communication skills module should be an integral part of the curriculum.

- c. Students should be exposed to culturally diverse case scenarios with an emphasis on importance of art of history taking of patient, in challenging and emotionally sensitive situations.
- d. Adequate community-based learning opportunities should be made available for students, right from the first year of training.
- e. Every Institution should formulate a robust research policy, giving due importance to undergraduate research. Constitution of Research Clubs with defined objectives should be encouraged.
- f. Institution should foster critical thinking amongst budding professionals by way of evidence-based learning strategies. Wall magazines should constitute a vital component for assessment of critical thinking.
- g. Adequate opportunities should be available for the student to nurture his / her hobbies, preferably on campus. Institution should strive to provide a cultural ethos by way of celebration of various festivals.
- h. There is a dire need to formally adopt Peer-Assisted Learning in the curriculum.
- i. Curriculum Mapping should be a mandatory component and should be appropriately modified according to the outcomes reflected in the annual academic audit reports.
- j. The mentor-mentee program should be able to develop the much-needed bonding between the facilitator and the student, identifying early signs of depression amongst the students, in order to prevent catastrophic events.

Conclusion

It would really be worthwhile to have a uniformity in graduate attributes for health sciences, aiming at producing a “competent basic health care professional”. Formulation of well-defined graduate attributes will definitely pave the way for structured evaluation of program outcomes matching global standards of medical education. Hope to see a well-armed healthy graduate.....

Declarations

Author contribution

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