

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

EXPECTATIONS OF A MEDICAL STUDENT: THE DEFICIT BETWEEN 'WHAT IS' AND 'WHAT SHOULD BE'

Ahsan Rasool, Maleeha Rasool, Umer Farooq*, Ashfaq Ahmad*, Sumbal Tariq**, Sabir Saeed***, Saliman Shah, Zainab Manan, Fiaz Ahmad, Ali Mohammed Yahya Haidar

Medical Students, *Department of Community Medicine, **Department of Pharmacology, Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad, ***Department of Anesthesia and Pain Management, Toronto General Hospital, Toronto

Background: Over past few decades, the expectations of medical students about their academics, extracurricular support from college and about their social life at campus have all been changed greatly. The relative scarcity of data about the expectations of Pakistani medical students has merited this study. **Method:** A cross-sectional survey was undertaken at Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad at the in December, 2012 based on random sampling technique. Expectation questionnaire of University of Northumbria for Survey of Student Attitudes, Experiences and Expectations was used. **Results:** One hundred and sixty-two students responded to the questionnaire with 93 (58.1%) males. Students had a fairly realistic picture of academic demands and college environment. There was major difference in the opinions of male and female students about physical environment of college with female having prior misconception about it. Forty-eight percent student found medical education challenging. About 63.3% students had realistic picture about study habits needed in the college. About 77.9% and 73.8% students had reasonable picture of academic staff and teaching methods at the college respectively. Students had a fair picture of the thorough help from teachers. About 63.5% students seemed well-prepared for the extent to which they would need to be independent learners at medical college. However expectations of 55.6% students about non-academic support were higher than provided. Also only 20.3% students found social adjustments easier than expected. About 39.5% students had fairly accurate expectations regarding the physical environment of the college; however in gender based comparison, about 55% female students felt being mistaken about the environment. **Conclusion:** Academic demands are fairly in accordance with the expectations of students. However there is a need to make course content interesting and more understandable. Also the extracurricular support in form of various facilities should be bolstered. Most importantly, the physical environment needs to be made more amicable especially for female students.

Keywords: expectations, medical students, academic demands, facilities, social adjustment

J Ayub Med Coll Abbottabad 2013;25(3):71-4

INTRODUCTION

Medicine is a field with high academics demands. It is related with the most personal and emotionally touching aspects of life like human suffering, death, sexuality and fear.¹ The academic demands along with psychosocial concerns make medical education very stressful for students.² Amidst this stress, expectations of medical students come forth as a paramount factor for creating career satisfaction amongst these future physicians.³ Satisfied and mentally healthy medical students are likely to become more energetic and efficient doctors, promoting healthy lifestyles.⁴

Each student comes to the class with certain expectations and needs. Meeting these expectations can foster the interest of students in the medical career and maximizes the learning capabilities of students.⁵ However unrealistic expectations of students often get shattered by the real life experience of medical education.⁶

Over the past few decades, expectations of students about academic demands have changed greatly.⁷ Various factors influence the interaction of

students with learning environments.⁸ Student expectations of quality, service and value for money are rising as they take on an ever greater share of the burden of financing higher education.⁹ Vast medical progress in recent years, change in demography and changing patterns of service use are all combining factors to bring about large-scale changes in the medical care of the general population.¹⁰ Increasing life expectancy and the associated multiple chronic diseases, together with increasing urbanization and the changing social values such as the family are all responsible for bringing change in the expectations regarding the medical profession.¹¹

Students of Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad, Pakistan belong to diverse cultural, socioeconomic, educational backgrounds; and hail from different parts of the country. Student from assorted backgrounds enter the College with different expectations about academic demands. Exposure to a new learning environment without meeting their expectations can be a very stressful experience. Studies are needed to determine the new emerging expectations

of students about medical education; environment of institutions and social interactions among students. The relative scarcity of data about expectations of medical students in Pakistan merited this study. This study was conducted to assess the expectations of students of Ayub Medical College: about academics, support provided to them, and their general and social expectations.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional survey was undertaken at Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad at the end of academic year in the month of December, 2012. Two hundred students were selected through systematic sampling technique i.e. every 6th student according to their class roll numbers by selecting the first one from digits 1 to 6 through simple random sampling. Number 1 was selected randomly and the rest of the sample was achieved by adding 6 to 1 and so on.

A self-administered based on Expectation questionnaire of University of Northumbria¹³ for Survey of Student Attitudes, Experiences and Expectations was used. The questionnaire was amended to meet the needs of medical college as well as Pakistani population based on pre-testing report. The institutional ethics committee of AMC approved this study. The questionnaire consisted of 4 domains:

1. **Expectations about Academics:** this domain included questions regarding expectations about medical education, study habit, academic staff and teaching method.
2. **Expectations about Support provided to students:** this domain included questions regarding expectations about academic support, non-academic support, teachers being helpful and need to become an independent learner.
3. **Social expectations:** this domain included questions regarding expectations about ease of making friends.
4. **General expectations:** this domain included questions regarding expectations about physical environment and interest about course.

The participants were assured of confidentiality of the information and had option of refusal to participate in the survey. The questionnaires were distributed amongst students during breaks from their teaching schedule. The researchers collected the completed questionnaires.

Measuring tool was set in a manner that responses of all questions (except 1, 5, 6, 8 & 10) were sorted out into two categories of 'accurate' and 'mistaken'. Response of question 1 were 'challenging', 'accurate' and 'easy' while that of question 5 and 6 were sorted out into 3 categories of 'higher', 'about right' and 'lower'. For question 8 the categories were 'harder', 'about right' and 'easier' and for question

10 categories were 'interesting', 'about right' and 'boring'. Data was analyzed using SPSS-16.

RESULTS

One hundred and sixty-two (81%) responded with 93 (58.1%) males. Others refused to take part in the survey. Respondents' ages ranged from 19–24 years. There were 37 (22.2%) from 1st year, 34 (21%) from 2nd year, 41 (25.3%) from 3rd year, 24 (14.8%) from 4th year, and 27 (16.7%) from final year MBBS classes.

Expectations about Academics: Students reported having a realistic picture of academic demands and college environment. There was no significant difference in the opinions of male and female students except about physical environment of college with females having prior misconception about it. Academic issues were in accordance with students' expectations. Regarding the habit of studying as required in the college, 78 (48.4%) students felt that they were 'quite accurate'. They had a fairly realistic picture of academic staff. Similarly students reported having a reasonable picture about teaching methods they would encounter. However, medical education did not appear easy to 148 (91.3%) (Table-2).

Expectations about Support provided to students: Students reported having quite accurate expectations about the support provided by the college. Expectations of 90 (55.6%) students about non-academic support were higher than provided. Students reported having a fair picture of the thorough help from teachers. One hundred and two (63.5%) students were well-prepared for the extent to which they would need to be independent learners at medical college (Table-1).

General expectations: Forty-four (27.1%) students felt that content of course was attention-grabbing. Seventy-six (46.9%) students found their studies unexciting than had expected. The course content was about as expected to 42 (25.9%) students. Eighty-two (50.6%) students reported having accurate expectation about the physical environment of the college, whereas 80 (49.3%) students felt mistaken about the environment.

While comparing gender of respondents, 52 (69.5%) female students felt being mistaken about physical environment of the college and 52 (58.4%) male students found college environment in accordance to their expectations (Figure-2).

Social expectations: Students were asked how easy or difficult making friends at the medical college had turned out to be, compared to their expectations, 44% found it harder than expected, 36% found it to be as expected and 20% found it to be easier than expected.

Table-1: Expectations about extracurricular support

Variable	Percentage
Expectations about non-academic support were	
Higher than expected	55.6
About right	29.5
Lower than expected	14.7
Expectation that teacher will help me thoroughly was	
Higher than expected	27.1
about right	62.3
Lower than expected	10.5
Expectations about the need to be an independent learner were	
Accurate	63.5
Mistaken	36.4

Table-2: Expectations about Academics Graph

Variables	Percentage
Medical education compared to my expectation is	
Challenging	48.10
Easy	8.60
Just as I expected	43.20
My expectations about the study habits I would need at the college were	
Accurate	63.30
Mistaken	39.60
My expectations about academic staff were	
Accurate	77.90
Mistaken	22.10
My expectations about teaching methods at the college were	
Accurate	73.80
Mistaken	26.30

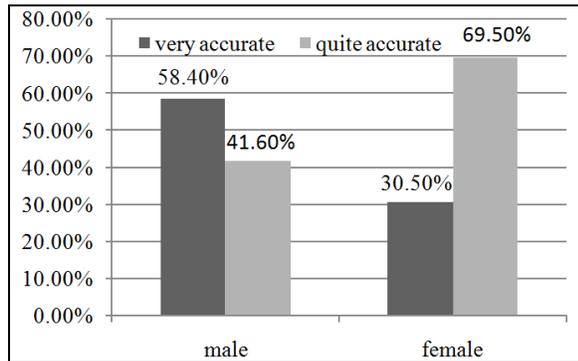


Figure-2: Gender based comparison of expectations about Physical Environment of College

DISCUSSION

In this study we assessed medical students’ expectation about the academic demands in a medical college. The results may have implications for the teachers as well as policy makers. To our knowledge such a detailed study has not been reported from Pakistani medical schools.

Various studies report that conventional medical education has been passive and boring.¹² High academic demands of medical education make it very stressful for the students.^{1,2} Our study also showed that majority of students did not find medical education easy; rather about half of them had over-estimated it to great levels. Our study indicated that 77.9% student had a fairly realistic picture about the academic staff. This is similar to a report of Round A¹³ indicating that 63.1%

had similar views. Majority of the students were well prepared for the required study habits. This is consistent with the report of Ball S *et al.*¹⁴

Brown T¹⁵ indicated that medical students often encounter difficulties in their course that affects their academic ability and professionalism for which they need academic as well as non-academic support. Our study indicated that students were satisfied with the academic support provided by teachers and teaching methodology. However, only 29.5% students found non-academic support up to their anticipated level. The satisfaction upon teachers’ help and teaching methodology is consistent with the report of Lokuhetty MD *et al.*¹⁶

Our study also indicated that students seemed well-prepared for the extent to which they would need to be independent learners with 45.9% having ‘quite accurate’ estimation. Our results are consistent with report of Round A¹³ indicating that as many as 52.3% undergraduates had similar estimation of being an independent learner. Our results show that a total of 63.5% had a reasonable outlook about need to be independent learner. Lokuhetty MD *et al.*¹⁶ indicated that 68.2% students made a positive perception of learning. However, amongst these well prepared students, only few could find the non-academic support up to their desired level.

Adjustment of students with their colleagues and establishment of amicable relations with others has great impact on their academic adjustment. Our study showed diverse results as far social adjustment is concerned with 46.1% students feeling that making friends was not difficult. Our results are quite similar with report of Round A¹³ indicating that 56.7% undergraduate students had similar feelings about making friends. Lokuhetty MD *et al.*¹⁶ also indicated that 52.3% students were socially quite settled. However the different opinions of as many as half of the students can be related to their diverse backgrounds. Kernburg *et al.*¹⁷ also reported the variations in social adjustment among different masses of students.

Expectations of the environment may vary with the educational and social background of the students from different regions. Our study showed that environment of the college was not in contrast with expectations of majority of students. Lokuhetty MD *et al.*¹⁶ also indicated that satisfaction of students over the environment. Report of Round A¹³ indicated that as many as 67.7% students had been quite accurate in their expectations about environment. However over-estimation of environment by 49.6% (35.0%+14.6%) showed that some aspects of the educational environment had dissonance with expectations of students as indicated by Miles S *et al.*¹⁸

Our study indicated that about as much as one half (46.6%) of students rated the course as boring than expected. This is consistent with studies of Nandi PL *et al*¹² and Brown T¹⁵ that medical students often encounter difficulties in their course and that students of the conventional curriculum found learning to be “non-relevant, passive, and boring”.

CONCLUSIONS

Students have a realistic picture of academic demands and educational environment of college. Academic demands are fairly in accordance with the expectations of students. There is no significant difference in opinions of male and female students expect about physical environment. However, students are not satisfied with the non-academic support in form of the facilities provided by the college. Also content of course needs to be made interesting.

RECOMMENDATION

Content of course should be made more palatable. Non-academic support in the form of general facilities in the college should be increased. Physical environment should be made more amicable especially for female students.

REFERENCES

1. Srivastava K, Raju M, Saldanha D, Chaudhury S, Basannar D, Pawar A, *et al*. Psychological well-being of medical students. *Med J Armed Forces India* 2007;63(2):137–40.
2. Shah M, Hasan S, Malik S, Sreeramareddy CT. Perceived Stress, Sources and Severity of Stress among medical undergraduates in a Pakistani Medical School. *BMC Med Educ* 2010;10(1):2.
3. Reed VA, Jernstedt GC, McCormick TR. A longitudinal study of determinants of career satisfaction in medical students. *Med Educ Online* 2009;9:11. [cited Dec 15, 2012] Available from <http://www.med-ed-online.org>
4. Wolf TM. Stress, coping and health: enhancing well-being during medical school. *Med Educ* 1994;28(1):8–17.
5. Mupinga DM, Nora RT, Yaw DC. The learning styles, expectations, and needs of online students. *Coll Teach* 2006;54:185–9.
6. Fernando N, McAdam T, Youngson G, McKenzie H, Cleland J, Yule S. Undergraduate medical students' perceptions and expectations of theatre-based learning: how can we improve the student learning experience? *Surgeon* 2007;5(5):271–4.
7. Regan MC, Roland HE. University students: A change in expectations and aspirations over the decade. *Sociol Educ* 1982;223–8.
8. Sheard J, Lynch J. Accommodating learner diversity in web-based learning environments: Imperatives for future developments. *Int J Comput Proc Oriental Lang* 2003;16:243–60.
9. Coaldrake P. Responding to changing student expectations. *High Educ Manage* 2001;13(2):75–92.
10. Gibis B, Heinz A, Jacob R, Müller CH. The career expectations of medical students: findings of a nationwide survey in Germany. *Dtsch Arztebl Int* 2012;109:327–32.
11. Tolhurst HM, Stewart SM. Balancing work, family and other lifestyle aspects: a qualitative study of Australian medical student's attitudes. *Med J Aust* 2004;181:361–4.
12. Nandi PL, Chan JN, Chan CP, Chan P, Chan LP. Undergraduate medical education: comparison of problem-based learning and conventional teaching. *Hong Kong Med J* 2000;6:301–6.
13. Round A. A Survey of Student Attitudes, Experiences and Expectations. [document on internet] School of Education, University of Waikato 2005 [cited 2012 Dec 15]. Available at: <http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/static/workdocuments/ardocs/304165.doc>
14. Ball S, Bax A. Self-care in Medical Education: Effectiveness of Health-habits Interventions for First-year Medical Students. *Acad Med* 2002;77:911–7.
15. Brown T, Eagles JM, editors. *Teaching Psychiatry to Undergraduates*. England: RCPsych Publications; 2011.
16. Lokuhetty MD, Warnakulasuriya SP, Perera RI, Silva HT, Wijesinghe HD. Students' perception of the educational environment in a Medical Faculty with an innovative curriculum in Sri Lanka. *South East Asian J Med Educ* 2010;4(1):9–16.
17. Kernberg PF, Clarkin AJ, Greenblatt E, Cohen J. The Cornell interview of peers and friends: development and validation. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 1992;31:483–9.
18. Miles S, Leinster SJ. Medical students' perceptions of their educational environment: expected versus actual perceptions. *Med Educ* 2007;41:265–72.

Address for Correspondence:

Ahsan Rasool, MBBS Student, Ayub Medical College, Abbottabad, Pakistan. **Cell:** +92-301-5251690

Email: ahsanrasool.dr@gmail.com