

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR FIRST YEAR UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS: COLLECTING EVIDENCE FROM STUDENT FEEDBACK

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Background: Orientation programs are globally common and conducted in medical schools. This study was conducted to assess students' perceptions and to quantify students' feedback. **Methods:** This study was conducted at Rai Medical College, Sargodha, Pakistan. Students' feedback was sought related to the organization of orientation program, topics covered and the material presented to them, benefits gained by them and logistics. Being on the Likert scale, Median scores were calculated for each response. Suggestions were asked at the end using open ended questions. **Results:** Response Rate was 100% (n=97). When asked about the organization of the entire week, topic preparations, and speakers' presentations, students agreed that it was good, with the median score of 4 out of 5. Students also agreed regarding their better orientation towards what they would be taught during their 5 year MBBS course, with median scores of 4. Regarding logistics arrangement, the score was 3.5. **Conclusion:** Assessment of feedback obtained from students helps in analyzing the effectiveness of the program and shows that conducting orientation sessions gives clarity to the students and alleviates their anxiety.

Keywords: Orientation program, students, medical, feedback, evidence

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INTRODUCTION

Orientation programs and commencement addresses are common in medical schools around the world since the past many decades.¹ Research has also shown that such activities serve as a foundation for college success. If properly conducted, orientation programs create a lasting impression for new students and their families.²

In South Asia as well, this trend is very common. At KIST Medical College, Lalitpur, Nepal a week long orientation program is offered to all first year students introducing them to teaching learning activities, the curriculum and faculty members.³ At a medical college in Hyderabad, India, a 3-day orientation program addressing study skills, history of medicine, ethics and values, time management, communication skills and community health, among other topics, was conducted for first year students.⁴ Studies reveal that by such orientation cadres, the students are familiarized with their institution and it helps them to alleviate their anxiety. It has been found that with the increase in the amount of time for first-year students to become familiar with their respective institution, the greater the likelihood they will stay throughout their first year of college and will have more chances of achieving academic success.

Medical studies are time-consuming and very stressful. They require a lot of dedication and effort on behalf of any student. An exhaustive curriculum with minimal time for relaxation, high parental expectations, fear of ragging, humiliating teachers, loneliness, and a host of other factors make the first year difficult for most students.⁵ These factors can accumulate as plethora

of stressors and drop-outs amongst students during first year of their training. Thus efforts have to be made to orient the students to their new environment. The aim of our orientation program, like various other such models across the globe was to make the students understand the collegiate experience, university expectations, and enable them to take personal responsibility for their own social and academic choices. A review of the higher education literature documents the value of orientation programs in welcoming new students into the collegiate experience and providing students with tools to be successful academically and socially.⁶

Feedback of any program helps in quality assurance by collecting evidence to improve further programs. By administering the orientation and New Student Programs study, student affairs professionals can now gauge the quality of orientation and new student programs as well as the impact they have on students' adjustment to the university and academic and social success⁷; therefore, we can say that on the whole, orientation programs are largely aimed at helping students develop a sense of connection with the college environment by initiating the process of integrating students into the campus culture.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted at Roy Medical College, Sargodha, Pakistan, in January 2016. Institutional and Ethical approval, for conducting the study was obtained from the concerned authorities.

The study used Census method and questionnaires were distributed among the 97 newly admitted 1st year MBBS students during a feedback session conducted at the end of the orientation week after taking informed consent from them. All 1st year MBBS students who attended the orientation week were included in the study; those who for some reason were unable to attend were excluded from this study. The questionnaire contained a total of 10 questions, responses to which were designed using the Likert type scale. Likert-type or frequency scales use fixed choice response formats and are designed to measure attitudes or opinions. These ordinal scales measure levels of agreement/disagreement.⁸ Data was analyzed using SPSS-22. Students' responses were marked according to the order: strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, undecided=3, agree=4, strongly agree=5. Main outcome variables were feedback of students regarding organization of the orientation week, relevance of the topics and logistics arrangement of the orientation week.

RESULTS

Response Rate was 100% (n=97). When asked about the organization of the entire week, students agreed it was good with the median score of 4 out of 5. Topics preparation and the speakers' presentation was agreed as good with median value of 4. Students agreed that they are now oriented towards what they would be taught during their 5 year MBBS course with median scores of 4. Finally, the opinion regarding logistic arrangements for the week was between 'indecisive' to 'agreed' with a total median score of 3.5.

The first component of the questionnaire was administrative. When asked about the organization of the orientation week 86 (88.6%) of students agreed that it was well conducted, while 2 (2%) disagreed. Students were also asked if they found guidance related to their queries. In response, 81 (83.5%) agreed and 8 (8.2%) disagreed.

The second part of the questionnaire covered the content of the sessions conducted. Majority (86, 88.6%) of students strongly agreed that the topics were well presented and 84 (86.6%) said the speakers were well prepared while 12 (12.4%) disagreed regarding preparedness of the speakers. Seventy-nine (81.4%) students perceived material provided to be understandable while 71 (73.2%) of students thought they developed a good idea of what they would be doing in their MBBS course. Nine (9.2%) felt they still need more guidance.

The third part of the questionnaire focused on the logistics. Here, the students were asked whether they thought that the classroom setting was comfortable and visits were well conducted. In response to this statement, 69 (71.1%) students agreed for both while 21 (21.6%) and 24 (24.7%) disagreed respectively.

Table-1: Topics covered in the orientation week

Topic	Time Allocation (Min)
Overview of the MBBS course	90
Professionalism & ethics	60
Communication skills	60
Time management	60
Learning strategies/stress management	60 +60
Community health care	60
Basic medical sciences (Introduction)	180

Table-2: Students' response to organization, relevance of topics and logistics of orientation week

Variable	Median (IQR)
Organization for the orientation week	
a) Well organized orientation week	4 (0)
b) Received guidance about the queries	4 (1)
Relevance of the topics covered	
a) Opinion regarding novelty of the information	4 (0)
b) Opinion regarding presentation of topics	4 (1)
c) Feedback on well preparation of the speaker	4 (1)
d) Orientation of MBBS course	4 (1)
e) Suggestion regarding other topics to be covered	3 (2)
Response to logistics Support during orientation week	
a) Opinion regarding comfort of the Venue	4 (1)
b) Feedback regarding the conduct of visits	4 (2)

DISCUSSION

In Pakistan, the concept of orientation into professional institutions is becoming common. The topics covered by the various speakers during the study week included professionalism and ethics, metacognition, communication skills, time management, stress management skills, learning and teaching techniques and introduction to the different subjects that would be taught to students in the MBBS course. Visits of the college campus and attached teaching hospital were also conducted to orient the students about their new surroundings. An introduction of the college library was also given to the students so that they may be aware of how to use the digital library. The topic selection for the entire week was done by the Department of Medical Education keeping in mind the student psychology and issues which help them in dealing with stress and learning and teaching techniques.

The study conducted at the end highlighted that students benefited from orientation week. The questionnaire provided to them at the end of the week covered three aspects. The first component was administrative, where most of the students were satisfied with the organization and conduct of orientation week and they found it beneficial as far as guidance is concerned. Our findings are similar to a study conducted by Fox *et al*.⁹ They noted that successful orientation programs can also increase the probability that students will become involved in co-curricular activities and take advantage of available student services.⁹ Mullendore and Banahan noted the many roles and functions new student orientation serves on campus, promoting orientation as 'the college's best opportunity to

introduce a strong learning environment, build the foundations for academic success, welcome students and families to the campus community, promote student interactions with faculty and staff, and convey the values and traditions of the new institution'.¹⁰

The second part of the questionnaire covered the content of the sessions conducted. In this aspect, the area requiring emphasis of well preparedness of the speakers was highlighted and will be improved upon as it has impact on the newly arriving students and helps in clarification of concepts and alleviate anxiety.

The third part of the questionnaire focused on the logistics. Here, the students were a bit less satisfied with comfort of classrooms and conduct of visits. This led us to believe that we should focus more on the administrative aspects of the course and visits. An open ended question at the end also gave the students the option to provide their suggestions, related to the issues they felt should have been discussed. This feedback will now be used for improvements in the orientation week for the coming years. It has also been felt that in general, that students in 1st year MBBS have performed better than their counterparts in 2nd Year MBBS (who did not go through an orientation program) at the same stage last year.

The Department of Medical Education at Rai Medical College had conducted this week and many lessons have been learnt from this study. The orientation program will now be conducted on a regular basis for incoming first year classes for one week before regular academic activities begin.

CONCLUSION

Orientation weeks if conducted properly are very beneficial to the incoming students. It gives them a welcoming feeling on part of institution. The program in general helps to boost their confidence and equips them

with a better understanding of what to expect during their professional studies. Moreover, it is an excellent learning opportunity for the faculty and staff to learn from their experiences and improve their teaching activities accordingly.

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