

Forum Theatre: An Innovative Way to Teach Medical Students About Doctor-Patient Communication Skills

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Abstract

Good doctor-patient communication is crucial in delivery of high quality health care services. Unfortunately several studies reported poor level of attitudes and practices of medical students towards communication skills. Forum Theatre is an interactive form of theatre to promote dialogue between the audience and those performing on stage for his "Theatre". We implemented this 'Forum Theatre Method' to sensitize 140 first year MBBS medical students from Bharati Vidyapeeth University Medical College, Pune about Doctor Patient Communication Skills during their 'UG Teaching Programme'. Positive feedback from students reflected that this innovative method was found to be effective to enhance their knowledge and positive attitude towards doctor patient communication.

I. Introduction

An essential area of medical sociology is 'Doctor -Patient Relationship'. Sometimes by virtue of technical superiority, knowledge and skills, the doctor performs an authoritative role and issues "orders" to his/her patient. Some individuals may not be prepared to invest the doctor with full authority; this may lead to conflict between the doctor and patient. (K.Park).

Good doctor-patient communication is crucial in delivery of high quality health care services. It has the potential to help regulate patients' emotions, facilitate comprehension of medical information, and allow for better identification of patients' needs, perceptions, and expectations (Bredart A.et al., Arora N., Platt F at al.).

Medical students are going to be an important part of health care delivery system; therefore they should be well acquainted with communication skills which can be utilized to provide effective health care to patients. Unfortunately several studies reported poor level of attitude and practices of medical students towards communication skills. (Meryn S, Jones R et al.)

II. Forum Theatre Method

Forum Theatre is an interactive form of theatre created by the Brazilian Director Augusto Boal as part of what he calls his "Theatre of the Oppressed." This approach promotes dialogue between the audience and those performing on stage for his "Theatre". (Brett-MacLean et al.) The goal of forum theatre is to make people more aware of some problems that they may have not considered previously. Forum theatre scenarios are designed to stimulate audience participation through discussion, interactive role-playing and shared experiences. (Brett-MacLean et al.) In this method, an audience is shown a short play in which a central character often called as 'Protagonist' encounters an oppression which he/she is unable to overcome; subject matter is something of immediate importance to the audience members, often based on shared experience. When the play is performed, members of the audience can come to the stage, modify the script and suggest alternative options/solutions for how the protagonists could have acted. Entire play is facilitated by person known as 'JOKER' and an audience in this method is called 'SPECT-ACTORS'

III. Methodology

We implemented this 'Forum Theatre Method' to sensitize 140 first year MBBS medical students from Bharati Vidyapeeth University Medical College, Pune about Doctor Patient Communication Skills during their 'UG Teaching Programme'.

Firstly, the structured script for play was prepared by trained

facilitators which was based on problems in communication between doctor and patient. Various components of communication skills like Rapport building, Greeting the patient, Confidentiality and Privacy, Use of clear and simple language, Non-judgemental attitude, Explaining the issues properly, Active listening, Time to time reassurance etc. were incorporated into the script. Few volunteer students were trained for this script. One trained faculty member was identified as 'Joker' to facilitate entire activity. An audience was asked to watch entire play without any interference. At the end of performance, audience was given 20 minutes to think on performed play and find out suitable solutions encountered in play. After that, same performance was repeated and that time, audience members were invited to freeze, come up on the stage and take the place of character on the stage with the purpose to modify the play. Repeated attempts were done by Joker to motivate audience members to get involved in the activity especially those who were hesitant to participate.

At the end of activity, each audience member was asked to state 'Take Home Message' from the activity for various aspects of doctor-patient communication skills. It was followed by written open ended feedback from students regarding this innovative method. Students liked this method and gave positive feedback about it.

Some of the major aspects of feedback;

1. We came to know new method of teaching 'Forum Theatre' which is innovative and interesting.
2. Forum theatre means 'Education through entertainment'
3. It was great learning experience about doctor-patient communication.
4. First time we understood various components of doctor-patient communication.

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