DO WE NEED END YEAR PROFESSIONAL EXAM IN A MODULAR SYSTEM IN MEDICAL COLLEGES IN ADDITION TO THE END MODULE EXAMS

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Over the years Medical education has an impact on the curriculum designing in medical colleges1. The traditional curriculum has been replaced by the modular system. In the modular system we have a summative assessment at the end of the module. The module team can take as many formative assessments as possible. The students take an exam at the end of every module. At the end of year then a summative exam is taken by the students which encompasses all the modules which are learnt by the students throughout the year. The modules which are learnt by the students throughout the year are assigned a certain weightage and the exam the at the end of year also has a certain weightage so that the total becomes 100%. Usually most of the medical colleges in Pakistan assign 40% weightage to modules covered in year and the exam at the end of the year carries 60% weightage.

PMDC has designed the end year professional exam system for the medical colleges in Pakistan for the traditional system2. This end year exam works well for the traditional system but for a modular system this creates extra burden on the students. The present method of conducting professional exam at the end of the year in module system is going on in many medical colleges in Pakistan. Over the years now we hear echoes of competency based curriculum. In addition to competencies specific to the medical profession (i.e., diagnostic competence), core competencies, such as communication skills or attitude have been considered important for achieving optimal professionalism3. Eventually, this aims to achieve best patient care. This means that a continuous monitoring is required throughout the year and feedback should be given to the students regarding their learning. Assessment is process which aims to achieve certain goals and is most effective when it helps to improve students' performance according to certain desirable expectations4. It works best when it is continuous, formative and summative and integrates teaching-learning strategies with certain measurable objectives5. The modular system is also preferred over the traditional system because analysts think that it reduces stress, anxiety and content overload among the students but the exam system is contrary to all this process. Are we giving the students a modular system with a more even exam load, which would, so it was thought, be fairer and less stressful. The answer is no. What happening is that the repeated exams in a year and a combined exam at the end increasing stress to a much higher level. In some studies the students hold the opinion that there is no need for annual exam once a number of formative and end module exams are taken6. This also requires more logistics and the faculty is also overburdened.

In Pakistan Agha Khan medical college and Shifa College of medicine are running modular systems affectively. They are taking end module written exams but combine the OSCES for two or more modules which come under the same theme. But in some college we have a mid-module summative exam which further adds anxiety to the students. In some medical colleges semester system is used for taking assessments. In the semester system again we need no end year exam ideally. In NUST in engineering and other fields semester system is present and they do not have end year exam which is beneficial for the students. A system which was designed to overcome the tension and anxiety is a source of over assessment and tension for the students as well as faculty7. The faculty has to design OSCES and MCQs for every exam and this is time consuming and when this has to be done frequently then the quality may suffer8. In our assessments mostly the facts are asked and the students are memorizing these facts all the times. It would be better if we include skills application of knowledge in our assessments on daily basis. Accountability is a sour issue whether on part of the students or the faculty so we have to be very clear regarding the timing and number of exams conducted per year.

Problem in our country is that we relate learning with the content covered and that content is asked in exams and our students naturally incline towards exam oriented studies. Ideally we should add continuous assessment in our curriculum which will evaluate learning of the students on daily basis. This will help in finding their weak areas and helping and diagnosing their problems. Portfolios should be designed and maintained. There should be remedial for the students who fail in the module exam and those who are slow learners but there should not be any end year exam. Increasing number of assessments does not drive learning but taking and designing quality assessments helps in learning.

REFERENCES


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