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First-Year Health Studies Students Perceptions and Expectations of Healthcare Management Education: Insights from a Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Healthcare management is an innovative and increasingly essential component in medicine. Clinicians traditionally manage it, but it now requires specialized knowledge due to growing complexities in healthcare delivery systems. This study evaluates first-year medical students' awareness of healthcare management education and its perceived relevance within their curriculum. A cross-sectional survey revealed limited initial familiarity with healthcare management concepts but a significant recognition of their importance. Global studies align with this, emphasizing the critical need for integrating leadership and management training into medical curricula [1-3]. Training in areas such as time management, patient safety, and stress management is identified as pivotal for future practitioners. The results advocate for healthcare management's inclusion in medical education to enhance the quality and equity of healthcare delivery. The study also underscores the global demand for interdisciplinary learning approaches to equip medical professionals with the competencies required to navigate modern healthcare systems effectively [4, 5]. Moreover, the results demonstrate that the majority of students (75%) agreed on the importance of healthcare management education in their training. These findings resonate with similar global studies and underscore the increasing need for leadership training in medical curricula [2, 3].

Keywords: Healthcare Management Education, Medical Leadership, Health Sciences Students, Medical Curriculum, Healthcare Policy, Interdisciplinary Learning

Introduction

The healthcare sector's evolution, driven by technological advancements, changing demographics, and policy reforms, underscores the necessity for robust management and leadership within medical practice. Despite this, hospital management training often remains overlooked in undergraduate medical education, leaving graduates unprepared for the managerial and leadership challenges they will face. Research has shown that a substantial gap exists in healthcare management education within many medical curricula, particularly in countries like India and the UK [1, 2].

Globally, frameworks like the Medical Leadership Competency Framework (MLCF) have recognized the importance of equipping clinicians with management skills to address systemic challenges in healthcare. These competencies, including resource allocation, conflict resolution, and service improvement, are critical for ensuring efficiency, patient safety, and the sustainability of healthcare systems [4, 5]. The growing complexity of healthcare delivery demands that medical professionals are trained to not only manage patient care but also lead healthcare teams, navigate policies, and ensure system-wide efficiency.

This study investigates first-year medical students' perceptions of healthcare management education. It aims to identify gaps in knowledge and suggest pathways for integrating management competencies into curricula, aligning with global best practices. The findings provide actionable insights to improve healthcare education and address the increasing demands of leadership roles in modern medical practice. The results indicate that a high

percentage of students (43.3%) have limited familiarity with healthcare management concepts, highlighting a significant area for improvement in early medical training.

Methodology

Study Design

This was a cross-sectional study conducted during May 2024.

Study Population

In the academic year 2023-2024, the distribution of students attending health sciences was as follows:

- Medicine: 70
- Nursing: 80
- Dentistry: 60
- Dental Technician: 10
- Biomedical Engineering: 15
- Biotechnology: 20
- Total number: 255

The response rate is roughly 24% (60/255). The study population consisted of 60 students attending the mentioned branches above that answered.

Variable Definition

The questionnaire analysis started by first dividing the variables into background and outcome variables. The background variables gathered in this research were age, gender, and academic programs. The ages of those who participated were 18, 19, and 20. Gender consisted of two groups: male and female.

The students that participated were part of these academic programs: Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Biotechnology, Dental Technician, and Biomedical Engineering. These were then put into three categories:

- Medicine and Nursing
- Dentistry and Dental Technician
- Biotechnology and Biomedical Engineering

The research continues now with the outcome variables.

The two main questions that were asked were:

- "How familiar are you with the field of Healthcare Management?"
- "Do you believe that Healthcare Management education is important?"

These questions were used to measure the attitudes and beliefs that health science students had regarding Healthcare Management. When it came to statistical data, question one and question two were categorized into two groups so there could be a better understanding of the results.

The questionnaire continued with questions regarding the students' learning interests and preferences when it came to more specialized topics. The topics presented were:

- Health care delivery systems
- Health Care Policy and Advocacy
- Health economics
- Quality Improvement in Healthcare
- Leadership and Management

A composite score was then added to all of them in categorized groups of three so that the statistical analysis would be clearer.

Statistical Analysis

A cross-tabulation study between background and outcome variables was used for the statistical analysis. Each outcome variable was cross-tabulated with all three background variables. The chi-square test was used to compare the distribution of outcome variables with background variables. A P-value of ≤ 0.05 was considered statistically significant. A statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS, 27) was used for the statistical analysis.

Results: Description of the Study Population Background Characteristics

Background variables	Number	%
Gender:		
Male	17	28.3
Female	43	71.7
Total	60	100%
Age:		
18	9	15
19	27	45
20	24	40
Branch:		
Medicine, Nursing	28	46.7
Dentistry	13	21.7
Eng…	19	31.7

According to the background values, it is evident that the percentage of female participants in the questionnaire was much higher than that of males, with 71.7% to 28.3%. Regarding the age variable, most participants were either 19 or 20 years old, with just a small percentage being 18 (15%). The academic branch numbers indicate that medicine and nursing students were much more interested in participating in the questionnaire, with biotechnology and biomedical engineering students coming in second place. Dental students did not have a high interest in participating.

Description of Outcome Variables

Outcome Variables	Number	%
Q1:		
No/Little	26	43.3
Moderate/Very	34	56.7
Total	60	100%
Q2		
<=Neutral	15	25
>=Agree	45	75
Learning outcomes		
0-1	22	36.7
3-Feb	25	41.7
6-Apr	13	21.7

The results of Table 2.2 show that when it comes to the importance of healthcare management education, females have a higher percentage of agreement compared to males.

Association of Outcome Variables and background characteristics

Q1

Background variables	Q1						
	Total		No/Little		Moderate/Very		P-value
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Gender:							
Male	17	100%	8	47.10%	9	52.90%	0.134075
Female	43	100%	18	41.90%	25	58.10%	
Total	60	100%	26	43.3	34	56.70%	
Age:							
18	9	100%	3	33.30%	6	66.70%	2.986425
19	27	100%	15	55.60%	12	44.40%	
20	24	100%	8	33.30%	16	66.70%	
Branch:							
NurNursingursing	28	100%	12	42.90%	16	57.10%	0.254221
Dentistry	13	100%	5	38.50%	8	61.50%	
Eng…	19	100%	9	47.40%	10	52.60%	

Q2

Background variables	Q2						
	Total		<=Neutral		>=Agree		P-value
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Gender:					12	70.60%	0.064062
Male	17	100% 100%	5	29.40%		76.70%	
Female	43	100%			33		
Total	60		10	23.30%	45	75.00%	
			15	25.00%			
Age:				11.10%	8	88.90%	0.143444
18	9	100%	1	29.60%	19	70.40%	
19	27	100%	8	25.00%	18	75.00%	
20-Jan	24	100%	6				
Branch:							

Medicine, Nursing	28	100%	5	17.90%	23	82.10%	0.154449
Dentistry Eng…	13	100%	4	30.80%	9	69.20%	
	19	100%	6	31.60%	13	68.40%	

Learning Preferences

Background variables	Total		0-1		3-Feb		6-Apr		P-value
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Gender:									
Male	17	100%	2	11.80%	10	58.80%	5	29.40%	0.325172
Female	43	100%	20	46.50%	15	34.90%	8	18.60%	
Total	60	100%	22	36.70%	25	41.70%	13	21.70%	
Age:									
18	9	100%	4	44.40%	2	22.20%	3	33.30%	0.257571
19	27	100%	12	44.40%	11	40.70%	4	14.80%	
20	24	100%	6	25.00%	12	50.00%	6	25.00%	
Branch:									
Medicine,	28	100%	12	42.90%	13	46.40%	3	10.70%	0.278995
Nursing	13	100%	3	23.10%	5	38.50%	5	38.50%	
Dentistry Eng…	19	100%	7	36.80%	7	36.80%	5	26.30%	

The research shows that a high percentage of students (43.3%) were very little familiar with health care management or even not at all. The other part, 56.7%, were either moderately or very familiar with the study branch. When it comes to the second question regarding the importance of health care management education, the number displays that 75% of students agree on the importance of the academic branch, and the other 25% are neutral on this part. According to the third question, it is revealed that a high percentage of students (41.7%) show high interest in 2-3 topics, followed by 36.7% who show interest in just 1 topic, and then 21.7% are interested in more than 4 topics.

Discussion

The study revealed several key findings about first-year health science students' perceptions of health care management. Overall, it was found that although the percentage of students who were familiar with the field was higher, the percentage of those who were unfamiliar or very unfamiliar with the field was still high (43.3%). This shows that there is a potential information gap among students when it comes to this topic. When it came to the importance of the subject, the majority of students were in favor, which shows that even if not fully informed, the desire to know more is still there. Demographics showed some level of influence in some of the questions, with female students showing higher familiarity and interest.

If we make a comparison of this study with other literature reports, it is evident that there are similar key findings among them. Emphasize that most healthcare professionals enter work with very little familiarity with management or leadership skills, which reflects 43% of the students [6]. Both argue in their respective papers about the importance of healthcare management education in enhancing the efficacy and quality of health systems and services [7, 8]. This agrees with our paper results about the 75% of students highlighting the importance of healthcare management. Found that most health sciences students favor subjects like healthcare policy, leadership, and quality improvement [9]. This is along the same lines as our results regarding the students' different learning preferences.

Even though this study has its limitations, it still adds a contribution to international studies because it provides factual insights into the perspective of Albanian students, and it is also a reflection of the country's stance on the importance of health care management. While there are a lot of studies done about developed countries there is still a low number of researches being done in Eastern and Western European countries. This study aims to fill this gap and tries to provide more evidence-based research on the student's perception and knowledge regarding this field of study. As mentioned above, despite these new insights, there are still a lot of gaps that require immediate attention. The 43% of students not very familiar with healthcare management warrant a need for a much better integration of health management in Albanian school curricula at a much younger age regardless of their specialization. The amount of practical training must increase since it is apparent that the students have a high level of interest in certain topics related to the subject.

It is important to continue this research in depth and with a larger number of participants this time, not only at our university but locally and nationally as well. Similar research could be conducted in other countries of the Western Balkans so that a comparative study could be done.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms the need to incorporate healthcare management education into undergraduate medical training as a strategic priority. A structured curriculum, starting with elective modules and transitioning to core components, could address the current gaps. Employing interactive teaching methods such

as case-based learning, simulations, and collaborative platforms will enhance student engagement and practical understanding [2, 3]. Furthermore, aligning with frameworks like the MLCF and leveraging international best practices will ensure that students acquire the necessary skills to lead and innovate in healthcare. The global healthcare landscape's complexity necessitates interdisciplinary education that blends clinical and managerial expertise.

The statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in outcomes based on age or gender, suggesting that curriculum adjustments should target all students equally, regardless of demographic factors. The educational reforms proposed in this study align with the broader vision outlined in the World Health Organization's framework for strengthening health systems and the 21st-century transformation of health professional education. By investing in such reforms, medical education systems can improve not only individual career trajectories but also the overall capacity of healthcare systems to deliver equitable and effective care.

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