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Are We Different or Similar to the Rest of the World?

Abstract:

Are Asian schools similar or different to the rest when it comes to teaching medicine? When teaching medicine, the curricula design including content, delivery and assessment are planned based on healthcare and societal needs. The gap between these needs and availability of doctors, in turn determines the number and location of medical schools. There has been a sharp increase in the number of medical schools globally especially in the Asian region. While increasing the number of medical schools addresses these needs, this paper will discuss the impact of this increase in the teaching of medicine with Malaysia as an example.

To determine the impact of increase of medical schools in teaching medicine, we studied the number, models, and teaching learning methods of medical schools in Malaysia. The impact on students, faculty, teaching and learning methods, clinical learning sites, accreditation and graduate work readiness was analysed.

In Malaysia the number of medical schools in the country has increased by 10 fold in 25 years. Private medical schools now outnumber publicly funded schools and there are several models of medical education ranging from developing own curriculum to adapting curriculum from overseas universities. Some of these models show innovation in cross cultural and global health education blending best practices in medical education with the local environment, similar to the 'glocal' concept of think global, act local. The increase in medical schools also resulted in a growth of other health professions programmes including pharmacy, dentistry and nursing. Given the increase and the diverse models within medical schools and other health professions programmes, it was crucial that an accreditation system be set up with common frameworks for standards and requirements, based on international benchmarking and be governed independently. In Malaysia this responsibility lies with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency and the respective professional bodies. Accreditation has had a positive impact in the teaching of medicine as schools were required to use an outcome based education framework mapping outcomes and competencies to be achieved across the programmes with relevant formative and summative assessment tools. There are challenges though and these include the diversity of students and their readiness for self-directed learning, faculty adapting to the various roles and competencies needed of a medical teacher, availability of clinical learning sites and resources, compliance to accreditation standards and expertise in medical education.