



A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY TO IDENTIFY REASONS OF ABSENTEEISM AMONGST UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS IN CENTRAL INDIA.

Amrita Pateriya

Deputy Registrar, Administrative section, GMC, Bhopal.

Dr Gaurav Agrawal

PhD Management, Faculty of Management, Rabindranath Tagore University, Bhopal.

Dr Ashish Kumar Meena*

PG, Community Medicine, GMC, Bhopal. *Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Introduction- Medical education as known is an important component of health care. In the current times there is increased emphasis on providing quality medical education amongst students. During the time of lockdown in 2020-2021 the education was imparted by online platforms. The classes resumed as soon as pandemic was controlled. But there was decline in attendance of undergraduate students at medical college Hence this study was taken to find reasons for absenteeism of students. **Methodology-** The cross-sectional study was initiated after obtaining authorization from Institutional ethics committee approval (IEC). In total 269 students participated in this study. The data from participants was obtained using pre-designed pilot tested questionnaire. The results were analyzed using MS-Excel 2020 & presented as percentages & proportions. **Results-** In total 80.7 % do not attend classes regularly & have attendance below 70% especially during morning classes. Almost 28.3 % participants disliked the contents taught in offline classes whereas 29 % students preferred content provided by online educational platforms. Also 27.9% students prioritize Pre PG preparation over under graduate studies. **Conclusion-** The study provided us reasons of absenteeism from offline college classes. Although all the students of selected batch could not be included. But still it gives us identify gaps which needs to be addressed to motivate students to attend regular classes.

KEYWORDS : Absenteeism, lockdown, online educational platforms

INTRODUCTION

A regular attendance is very important as student's over-all growth increases significantly over time when they attend regularly and have strong connections to all aspects of college learning. Research demonstrates there is a powerful link between successful learning and regular attendance. It is the primary indicator of a student's engagement levels with their course of study. It also serves as a first-level indicator for student retention, wellbeing, or academic progression. (1)

Also poor attendance can create learning gaps which in service of mankind cannot be accepted. There are many advantages of proper attendance monitoring it ensures building of critical career skills. It also earmarks students at-risk or struggling students in need of support. This also enable timely and critical outreach to students before it's too late.

Strict attendance helps in keeping track of what students are on-campus hence ensures critical campus safety. Also tracking student attendance in education can make life easier for staff and improve the student journey. For staff, attendance management gives them the right resources to provide the best educational experience possible to students. (2)

In context of undergraduate medical education it is absolutely necessary to attend the learning activities with full commitment. (3) Absenteeism of undergraduate students from medical and health science schools continues to be a major issue negatively affecting student performance (4) Class participation helps to enhance the student's understanding of the topics discussed, aids in facilitating class activities, and allows the student to develop ethical and moral values. In addition, attendance is an essential part of providing regulatory perspectives for sound professionalism (5,6). Absenteeism entails negative impacts on institutions as well. The university resources are underused, the teaching staff are not motivated, and the student-teacher relationship becomes burdensome. (7)

In times of pandemic there was use of online teaching methods which were used to provide medical education. Following which medical education via virtual platform was

thought as alternate to real time offline college training. Also there are availability of plenty of online medical education teaching platforms which are perceived to be more contemporary, interesting & convenient. There is also facility of re visiting these topics in latter times. The current batches of medical students are under the impression that theses online classes are alternate to offline classes. Hence losing their interest in actually attending the classes. This is an alarming trend as the responsibility of medical student is immense & the standards of medical education cannot be diluted. As well-known medical profession demands real experience & development of prowess to treat patients. Hence current study aims at identifying reasons for low attendance of medical students. The study shall also provide co relations of various factor associated with low offline college attendance.

Methodology-

After due ethical clearance from Institutional ethics committee (IEC). A cross-sectional observational study was conducted amongst under graduate medical students across 2018 & 2019 batch of Gandhi Medical College Bhopal. Informed consent was taken from all participants. The study was conducted in December 2022, after the attendance for previous completed semester was calculated and notified to students in November 2022. The students have at-least 3 months to achieve required attendance. The data was collected using predesigned pilot testing questionnaire.

The data was compiled using MS-Excel 2020 & presented as percentages & proportions. The relevant tests of significance were applied using Epi info-7.0.

RESULTS-

In total 269 students participated in study, 58.3% (157/269) students from 2019 batch & 34.28%(112/269) from 2020 batch respectively. Almost 16.4% (44/269) had attendance below 50 %, 64.3%(173/269) participants had attendance in range of 50-70% and 19.3% (52/269) participants had attendance above 70%.

DISCUSSION-

It is being observed in the recent times that there is significant

decline in attendance of undergraduate students in study area. Despite continuous reminders from concerned personnel to maintain desired attendance of 75 % there is vast majority of undergraduate students i.e. 80.7 % who do not attend classes regularly & have attendance below 70%. It was found that most commonly unattended class was morning lectures scheduled at 8-9am as stated by 39.4% participants. Also 13.4% participants did not have proper means of conveyance to come to college. Almost 6.3 % participants found the content of lectures to be un-interesting & 28.3% participants have poor understanding of content of lectures. This is similar to finding by Chaudhry SH et al. & Sharmin T et al^(8,9) that found that lack of interest in the subject, dislike for teaching style and the ease of understanding the subject matter without guidance were the major reasons for dwindling attendance.

Also 23.4% participants could not attend classes as it overlapped with clinical posting, hence they could not arrive on time for lecture. Almost 29 % students found that online content from various platform was more informative & contemporary, hence provides medical education virtually in comfort of dwelling. The naïve students are unaware of fact that medical education prepares them for real human life distress situations that could only be explained & acquired by training in real time.

In total 27.9 % participants prioritize Pre-PG -NEET preparation over undergraduate teaching hence do not feel need to attend college lecture. Also 25.77 % students found self study & group study as better studying option then attending classes. In 26 % participants could not attend classes due to health reasons. Almost 11.2% participants did not attend classes as they were under pressure from friends, peer & senior students who motivated them for mass bunk.

This finding is similar to observations by Sarita Kulbhusan Sharma and et al.(10) They further found that most common personal factors identified for not attending class was preparation of PG entrance, preference of self-studies, along with illness of self. Also they found that peer pressure was also known to be a very strong factor in shaping young adults' behaviours and plays a strong role as a cause of absenteeism. Monotonous teaching and less focus on practical applicability were important teaching related factors influencing absenteeism. (10)

A vast majority of participants found that lack of proper introductory class of the subject at the beginning of session decreases the interest in subject & confuses student. Almost 33.1 % subjects demanded that proper, impartial attendance should be maintained. There should be provision of red flags at regular intervals to curb absenteeism.

As a part of improvising undergraduate student attendance an application based attendance system should be used. The app should give information about schedule of lecture, topics to be covered in advance. The attendance should be notified to stakeholders on regular basis. Also to ensure acceptable attendance in morning classes strict vigilance is required along with scheduling of interesting lectures to motivate students to attend classes. Also by continuous training & retraining of teachers there teaching techniques could be improvised. The teaching curriculum can be made interesting by increasing content of applied knowledge with inclusion of case based scenario in clinical subjects lectures & better interactive session by increasing microteaching sessions.

Also the use of online platforms for medical education as used during lock-down during 2020 & 2021 should not be used as easy alternate to actual study, instead it should be perceived

as auxiliary study method and to be used only in periods of distress.

CONCLUSION-

The results of this study provide a valuable insight into reasons of absenteeism in medical students and interventions to reduce the same. The main influencing factors identified are ineffective teaching techniques, non-availability of interesting, contemporary content, priority to Pre PG preparation. Suggested rectification measures included attendances to be managed by applications with real time notification to stake holders, improved teacher student relationship by scheduling small group teachings in conducive classrooms. Also enhancing medical teacher education skills by regular training & retraining sessions. Also strict punitive measures like disallowing the students to appear on exams can be done. Taking into consideration that medical education is service to mankind & should prepare doctors that become asset to society absenteeism should not be tolerated.

Limitations-

All the students of both the batches could not be included in study.

Conflict of interest- None

Funding -None

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