



# Essential Skills in Medical Education for Students: An Online Course in Medical Education for the Doctors of Tomorrow

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## ABSTRACT

There is a growing awareness of the importance of students being engaged with their medical school and curriculum. The student version of Essential Skills in Medical Education (ESME) has been designed as an accessible online course. It provides an opportunity for interested students to begin to develop understanding in this topic and seeks to motivate their further interest in the teaching role of a doctor for tomorrow.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Student Engagement in the Curriculum

The extent of student engagement is a recurring theme when discussing or evaluating a medical school curriculum. Both instructions from statutory bodies, such as the General Medical Council in the United Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> and recognition by professional associations, such as Association for Medical Education in Europe (AMEE) in its Aspire for Excellence award<sup>2</sup> affirm this. The number of papers on the topic submitted to medical education conferences illustrates the extent of current interest. Other factors contributing to increasing student engagement may include the currency of self-determination, the requirement for increased accountability, and a cultural change in student attitude toward becoming a more active partner in teaching and learning rather than just a passive recipient.<sup>3</sup> As a result, student engagement with medical education is becoming an increasingly recognized component of medical school curricula.<sup>4</sup>

In 2015, six schools (Charité – Universitätsmedizin, Germany; Utrecht University, Netherlands; University of Leeds, UK; Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, Canada; Uppsala University Sweden; Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) were recognized for excellence in Student Engagement in their school and curriculum and were presented with the AMEE Aspire trophy at the Annual AMEE Conference in Medical Education in Glasgow attended by around 3,500 teachers and leaders in health profession education from around the world.

### Essential Skills in Medical Education Student Online Course

A further example of the current extent of student interest in medical education is supplied by the number of students who applied in January 2015 for the pilot run of an online course for students provided by AMEE, the international association for medical education. This AMEE/ESME (Essential Skills in Medical Education) course was designed to respond to the need for students to have experience in medical education, and to affirm and motivate those with an expressed interest in the teaching role of a doctor.<sup>5</sup> There were 150 applications from 36 countries of which we were able to enrol 70 free of charge for the pilot run in January to April 2015. There were 19 from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and China; 30 from the UK; and a further 21 from Europe, the Middle East, and the United States of America.

In the design of this 12-week course, we took the strengths of AMEE's very successful ESME online course<sup>5</sup> but presented the topics in a way which resonated with student experiences. We selected six key topics and presented these in six student modules of 2 weeks each:

- Module 1:* What is expected of the student as a teacher? The 12 roles of a teacher.
- Module 2:* What should medical students learn? Outcome-based education.
- Module 3:* How can learning be organized in the curriculum? The SPICES model.
- Module 4:* How can students learn more effectively? Part 1. The FAIR principles.
- Module 5:* How can students learn more effectively? Part 2. Teachers' toolkit.
- Module 6:* How can student learning best be tested? Student assessment.

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Online webinars on each topic were delivered fortnightly by Professor Ronald Harden and Dr. John Dent (UK) and Professor Richard Hays (Tasmania). We were impressed by the students' lively participation with the presenters as well as their related chat room discussions in the background! Archived copies of each webinar were available for subsequent review. We were conscious of the many demands of undergraduate life, so aimed not to overload participants with excessive amounts of prescribed reading. We provided hard copies of the support text, "Essential Skills for Medical Teacher"<sup>6</sup> and online access via the MedEdWorld website to additional resource material, including AMEE Guides and booklets in the "Getting started" series.<sup>7</sup>

Asynchronous, discussion groups relating to the topic of each module were tutored by Richard Hays, John Dent, and Dr. Cate Kennedy (UK). The majority of students contributed several posts to the discussion groups in each module. Each module ended with a short written assignment requiring the students to review the topic from their own experiences. These assignments were reviewed by their tutors and feedback provided. It was estimated that approximately 13 hours of student time would be required for each 2-week module. Sixty-two of the 70 students successfully completed the course and were awarded the AMEE/ESME certificate registering their achievement and their interest in medical education.

In January 2016, for the second offering of the course, some refinements were made. The course was widely advertised via medical school Deans and a modest fee was levied. A total of 35 students from 12 countries were enrolled, including 11 from the University of Health Sciences, Cambodia. Following the new developments with Phnom Penh, we were able to collaborate with Dr. Thomas Fassier and Dr. Julien Aron to supply local tutoring and facilitate a discussion group in French. Thirty-one of 35 students successfully completed the course.

## COURSE EVALUATION

An online questionnaire at the end of each course was completed by almost all students. Comments were positive for both the content and the delivery of the course. More than 90% found the course valuable and thought it met their expectations.

The webinars and assignments were both highly valued by 87 and 86% respectively. The discussion groups were "greatly" or "considerably" valued by 61.5%. Students enjoyed the international mix of their discussion groups. Archived copies of the webinars and the mixture of hard copy and online resources were appreciated.

Interestingly, 28% thought there was capacity for more course content.

## Informal Comments Included

*Webinar:* "Lots of opportunities for interaction and engagement within the webinar"

*Discussion groups:* "I developed social and interpersonal skills, communication and critical thinking through the online group discussions"

*Assignments:* "I enjoyed applying the concepts I learnt in the webinars and found the tutors' comments insightful and very valuable"

*General:* "It was a great experience not only to learn about how best to optimize medical education but also to learn how medical education is currently conducted across the world."

## DISCUSSION

The certificate awarded by AMEE for completing the ESME Student course has now been recognized by six international medical schools (University of Dundee and Liverpool University, UK; University of Khartoum, Sudan; Flinders University, Australia; Pontificia Universidad Católica, Chile; and University of Hong Kong, HK) as contributing to their own diploma or masters courses in medical education. It remains to be seen to what extent successful participants will take up this opportunity to develop their interest in medical education further. Having local tutors who were able to support participants by leading discussion groups in their own language was clearly a help to those less used to conversation in English. We look forward to offering this additional resource to other French-speaking participants and to attracting tutors able to facilitate discussion groups in other languages.

## CONCLUSION

The ESME Student course would appear to provide an accessible opportunity for interested students to acquire recognition for their interest in medical education and to learn more about the essential skills valuable for the teaching role of a doctor for tomorrow. The next ESME Student course will start on January 23, 2017.

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