

Growing up to be a physician studies – students' perspective

Growing up to be a physician studies offer interesting insights in the medical curriculum. They help students to encounter patients and to broaden their conceptions of doctor's work.

Background

'Growing up to be a physician' studies (GBP studies) were started at the University of Helsinki in 1994. These studies were introduced to enhance the future doctors' communication skills and to help the students to gradually adopt professional values, attitudes and behavior. It also aimed at motivating the students during the preclinical study years by offering them perspectives of their future work.

Today GBP studies are well-established and versatile. They cover all the study years (Figure 1) and are worth 11.5 ECTS credits. Communication skills courses focus on doctor-patient communication and advance step-by-step. In studies on primary health care the students visit health centers, observe consultations and meet GPs, patients and personnel. The ethics studies focus on hands-on ethical questions. Aspects of medical profession and professionalism are also introduced. Courses on scientific thinking and writing aim at supporting the student's thesis.

Students' feedback

Systematic web-based feedback from the students has been collected since 2002. The courses of ethics and communication skills are highly appreciated (Figure 2). Ethics courses focus on relevant and up-to-date ethical topics in medical practice.

Communication skills courses are tailored to meet the students competence and needs. In early theoretical study years the students practice basics of doctor-patient communication. In clinical study years they focus on more challenging communication with clinical details. Courses with simulated patients (actors) receive better feedback than those with video-recordings of real patients.

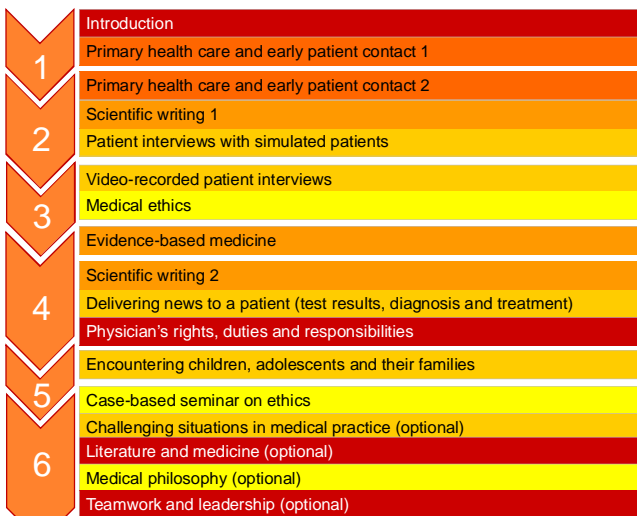


Figure 1

The students on the Swedish study line have all communication skills courses in Swedish. Their courses on primary health care differ partly from those of the Finnish study line and have received particularly good feedback throughout the years. Encounters with GPs and patients are highly appreciated during the early study years.

Scientific writing and EBM have received lower scores than other Growing up to be a physician courses. These courses would require a solid theoretical background and should form a coherent entity.

The optional courses on Literature and medicine and on Challenging situations in medical practice are among the most valued courses in the curriculum. They offer students new and interesting insights into doctor's work and medicine. Students appreciate the chance to choose a topic according to their own interest. The courses given by good charismatic teachers receive very good feedback throughout the GBP studies.

Future challenges

The Growing up to be a physician studies need continuous development as the doctor's work, health-care environment and the world of medicine are constantly changing. The organization and learning methods of courses on scientific thinking and professionalism may need revision. Topics of 'facing mistakes and malpractice' and 'patient safety' require further attention.

Students have wished to have courses on leadership, and these courses are soon to be brought into Growing up to be a physician studies. The aim is to enhance medical students' teamwork skills, to teach them to take a leading position in a multiprofessional team and to handle stressful situations such as emergency situations.

Take-home messages

The Growing up to be a physician studies offer the students humanistic perspectives in the otherwise hard-science world of medicine.

Constantly changing world requires constantly developing studies.

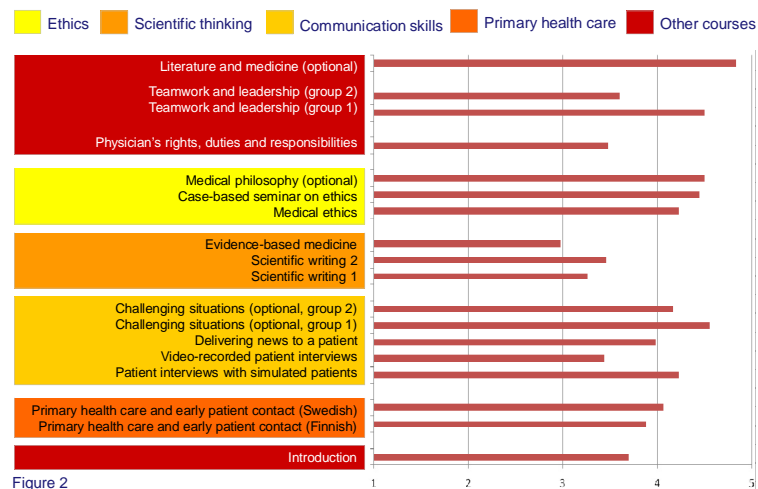


Figure 2

Figure 1: GBP courses and their timing in the curriculum.

Figure 2: Student feedback in 2007 – 2008 on statement 'The tuition was of good quality' on scale 1 = completely disagree 5 = completely agree