

## Assessment of attitude towards psychiatry among students who have just joined medical college compared with final year students who have completed their psychiatry postings and lecture series.

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**Abstract:** Mental health is one of the important aspects in one's life apart from physical, spiritual and financial well being. A healthy mind is believed to be a key in achieving satisfaction in an individual's life and it helps a person to cope with the normal stresses of everyday life, work efficiently and make a positive contribution to the society. Psychiatry is a relatively new specialty as compared to other branches of the medical sciences. Undergraduate medical students have been found to have multiple lacunae in their knowledge toward psychiatry, psychiatric disorders, psychiatric patients and psychiatric treatment. Adequate exposure to the subject of psychiatry is necessary through didactic lectures, clinical postings and case discussions to dispel these apprehensions, fears and misinformed notions concerning the subject and approach to psychiatric patients.

In the present study we are trying to assess the attitude of mbbs students towards psychiatry among students who have just joined medical college and compare them with final year students who have completed their postings and lecture series.

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### I. Introduction

Mental health is one of the important aspects in one's life apart from physical, spiritual and financial well being. A healthy mind is believed to be a key in achieving satisfaction in an individual's life and it helps a person to cope with the normal stresses of everyday life, work efficiently and make a positive contribution to the society. Mental illness, on the other hand, is a health problem that affects a person's thinking, feeling, and ability to relate and interact with others and adversely affects their performance. These illnesses limit one's capability in coping with ordinary demands of life.

Psychiatry is a relatively new specialty as compared to other branches of the medical sciences. Society in general, and medical students in particular are not fully aware of the scope and spectrum of this branch of science. Prejudice and discrimination against psychiatric patients are prevalent, socially damaging and stigmatized, fostering negative attitudes. Hence, it becomes important to impart basic knowledge and skills in diagnosis and treatment of the common psychiatric disorders to medical students so that they are able to deal with these disorders efficiently when they begin their clinical practice. Medical students need to get a basic understanding of the subject so that the outlook towards mental health improves in our country.

Undergraduate medical students have been found to have multiple lacunae in their knowledge toward psychiatry, psychiatric disorders, psychiatric patients and psychiatric treatment. Adequate exposure to the subject of psychiatry is necessary through didactic lectures, clinical postings and case discussions to dispel these apprehensions, fears and misinformed notions concerning the subject and approach to psychiatric patients. The fact that psychiatric disorders are just like other medical disorders, capable of being treated by counselling and therapy will help correct these attitudes among medical students. The need to introduce behavioural sciences and psychiatric knowledge throughout the undergraduate medical curriculum is mandatory. Introductory courses in psychiatry is presently included by the Medical Council of India from the second year of M.B.B.S. teaching programs. A graded exposure to clinical psychiatry during the clinical postings and lectures in the later years of undergraduate medical training is routine. However, these are limited to just 20 lectures and two weeks clinical posting over the entire four and a half year's course. We need to understand how

effective this exposure is for the students to help them gain adequate knowledge and sharpen their skills in psychiatry.

With this objective we conducted this study to assess their attitude towards psychiatry among students who have just joined medical college and compare them with final year students who have completed their postings and lecture series.

## II. Materials and Methods

The study was carried out at the NRI Institute of Medical Sciences, Visakhapatnam after obtaining ethical clearance from the Hospital Ethics Committee.

Objective: A cross sectional comparative study to understand and analyse the effect of psychiatric training in forming the attitude towards mental illness and psychiatry in general, by the end of their medical training.

142 first year (Group A) and 124 final year (Group B) medical students consisting of a total of 266 undergraduate medical students constituted the study group. Of the 142 first year students, 80 were girls and 62 were boys (Mean age 19 years) and of the 124 final year students 76 were girls and 48 were boys (Mean age 23 years).

Clinical training in psychiatry consists of twenty lectures and two weeks clinical posting at a stretch in groups of twenty students each. The authors imparted training to the students attached on various aspects of psychiatric history taking, diagnosis and management through clinical case discussions and a total of twenty didactic lectures.

All the target group students were assessed on their grasp of the basics of psychiatry, its scope and treatment aspects before and after the teaching program using a ATP 30-item semi-structured questionnaire. Students were not informed beforehand about conducting the tests. Initial sociodemographic profile of the candidates including place of origin, rural or urban, family history and personal history of psychiatric illness, whether they had taken a psychiatric patient for treatment were elicited. They were also asked if they had ever read about psychiatrists or psychiatry. The topics of the test questionnaire covered eight domains regarding psychiatric patients, illnesses, psychiatrists, psychiatric knowledge, psychiatric career choice, psychiatric treatment, institutions and teaching.

At pre test briefing, the students were apprised of the purpose of the study in order to assess their awareness about the specialty before starting the teaching programme, and also to assess the effectiveness of the teaching program, and that it was not linked to their examination assessment. All the students volunteered to participate in the study.

The data obtained through the 30 point questionnaire was statistically analysed using the SPSS Version 16 to quantify the significant differences between pre-test and post-test awareness on different aspects of psychiatry. 'P' value < 0.05 was considered as significant.

## III. Results

Sociodemographic analysis of Group A (First year medical students):

Among the first year students the psychiatric career choice (D5) score was more among females than males and this is statistically significant (P value ). All the other domains had no statistically significant differences between males and females in Group A.

Sociodemographic analysis of Group B (Final year medical students):

Though not statistically different, the scores were more in all domains for female students.

Comparison between Group A and Group B from questionnaire regarding the domains (Table 1):-

**Table 1**

	GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
D1	1.0	142	10.5986	2.16044
	2.0	124	10.5000	2.04621
D2	1.0	142	4.3451	.96054
	2.0	124	4.6290	.60442
D3	1.0	142	22.1338	3.00880
	2.0	124	22.7177	3.33389
D4	1.0	142	22.6972	2.96071
	2.0	124	21.8306	3.24281
D6	1.0	142	19.5000	2.64642
	2.0	124	19.5242	2.55815
D7	1.0	142	7.6268	1.53729
	2.0	124	7.3468	1.43728
D8	1.0	142	18.0211	2.34133
	2.0	124	17.5887	3.37858
D5	1.0	142	9.8873	2.26943

	2.0	124	9.4597	2.70320
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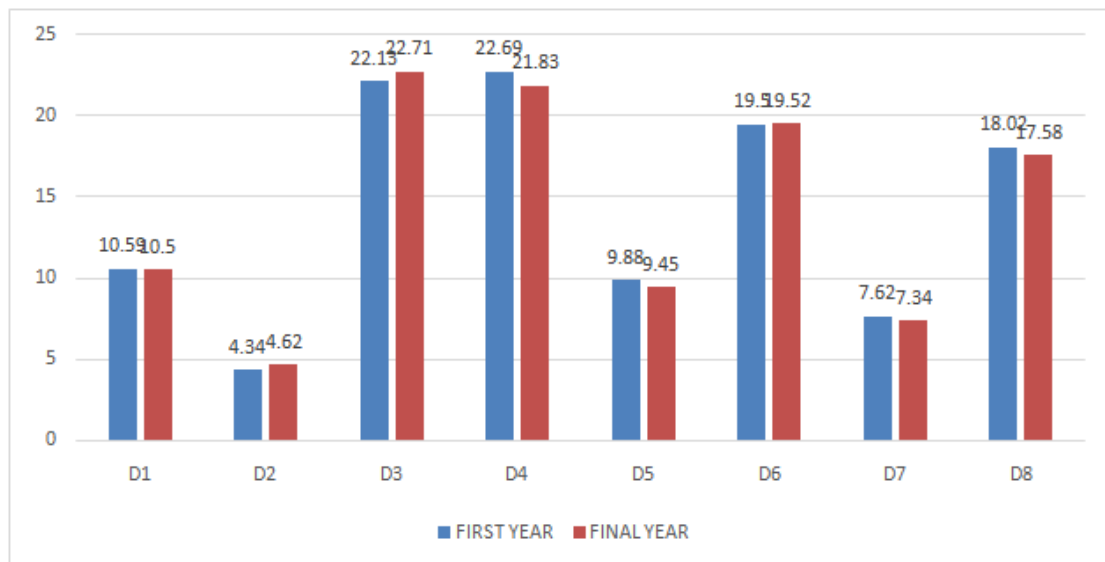
Domains related Mean & SD values

**Table 2**

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
D1	.381	264	.704
D2	-2.837	264	.005
D3	-1.501	264	.134
D4	2.278	264	.024
D6	-.076	264	.940
D7	1.527	264	.128
D8	1.225	264	.222
D5	1.402	264	.162

Comparison between Groups A & B with respect to the domains

**Figure 1**



Bar diagram showing differences between Groups A & B within the domains.

Group A had statistically higher scores in D1. This domain tests their attitude towards psychiatric patients. Hence they were more empathetic towards mentally ill patients.

There was statistically significant scores in D2 among Group B. This domain tests their knowledge of psychiatric illness. Hence final year students had a better overall understanding knowledge about the spectrum of psychiatric disorders.

D3 score were higher in Group B students. This domain reflects their attitudes towards psychiatrists. This finding was, however, not statistically significant.

D4 score was higher in Group A. This domain reflects a positive attitude towards psychiatric knowledge.

D5 score was higher in Group A. This domain shows their attitude of making psychiatry a career choice. D7, showing attitude towards psychiatric institutions was higher, so also D8 was higher which reflects their attitude towards psychiatric teaching.

D6 was higher though not statistically significant in Group B which reflects their attitude towards psychiatric treatment

#### IV. Discussion

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are about 500 million people worldwide with symptoms of neurosis and stress-related disorders and another 200 million suffered from chronic depression, bipolar, and mood disorders. Neuropsychiatric illnesses will rank fourth among the leading cause of diseases in India by 2020. The burden of mental and behavioural disorders averages 9.5 to 102 per 1000 population. The prevalence of mental disorders is high in females, elderly, disaster survivors, industrial workers and adolescents having chronic medical conditions.

People with mental illness are often subjected to stigma and discrimination. The number of psychiatrists in India is low and insufficient to deal with the growing burden of mental illness. The poor

popularity of psychiatry as a field of specialty is of global concern. It is imperative that the medical graduates possess the right attitude towards psychiatry and take it up as a career to provide a much needed boost to the specialty as well as care for those suffering from mental illness. Preconceived notions, perceptions and formative influences among medical students influence the future choice of a post graduate specialty. Better awareness of psychiatry, both in the public domain and among medical students, will reduce the burden of morbidity and mortality arising from mental illness in the community.

Psychiatry is taught to medical undergraduates for two weeks during the third or fourth year of medical curriculum in India. During this period the students are given intensive training with respect to psychiatric disorders through didactic and informal lectures, clinical demonstrations and case discussions.

Most of the related studies have dealt with change in attitudes of the students before and after conducting teaching programs in psychiatry<sup>(1,2,3,4,5,6,7)</sup> when a two weeks training programme in psychiatry was reported as inadequate in changing attitudes of medical students towards the speciality<sup>(8,9)</sup>. A favourable attitudinal change in students was observed after four weeks training<sup>(10)</sup> and after six weeks training<sup>(11,12,13,14,15)</sup>. This shows that longer duration of training leads to a better qualitative interaction with the psychiatric faculty members and patients creates a positive attitude towards psychiatry among the undergraduates. Duration of psychiatric training for two weeks as recommended by medical councils of developing countries like India and others needs to be reviewed considering the daunting nature of psychiatric problems and lack of trained specialists to manage this disease. Others<sup>(16)</sup> observed low career rewards and low social status of psychiatry in India are some of the factors hindering the development of a positive attitude towards psychiatry among medical students. Non-psychiatry faculty and fellow students dissuade those interested in the subject from opting for psychiatry in post graduation. However, it is encouraging to note that choice of psychiatry as a career increased to 18% after teaching sessions from 14% during pre-test in their study. This figure is much higher than earlier reports where only 3.9%-4% students preferred to opt psychiatry as their first choice<sup>(17,18)</sup>. The results point towards the fact that exposure of medical students in psychiatry for a brief period of two weeks had to some extent, created a positive image of psychiatry and better awareness about various psychiatric problems, symptoms, drugs and treatment modalities.<sup>(19,20,21)</sup> We had similar results in our study, except for attitude towards psychiatric knowledge which seems to have diminished with teaching. We feel that increasing exposure to biological psychiatry will have a good influence on this aspect.

## V. Conclusion

Our study found significant differences in the attitude towards psychiatry after training. The present curriculum has helped the students develop empathy and sensitizes them towards psychiatry patients.

Not enough change is observed among students in taking psychiatry as their career choice or towards psychiatric treatment. More intensive teaching and clinical experience is required for the medical students to effect this change.

Few students aspire for Psychiatry as a specialty of first choice as a career. The clinical postings in Psychiatry can be modified so that student-patient interaction increases and arouses the interest among students. This will help in making the experience more practical for students.

In their letter dated 20 August 2011 addressed to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, MCI referred to the discussion with IPS held at MCI on 13 May 2011. MCI said the following have been incorporated into the curriculum of Psychiatry, for the undergraduate MBBS course:

1. The teaching hours in Psychiatry are increased from 20 to 40 hours.
2. The clinical posting in Psychiatry has been increased from 2 weeks to 4 weeks
3. The doubling of the marks to 20 in the theory paper for medicine and it was agreed that the questions of Psychiatry would be made mandatory
4. Internal assessment in Psychiatry to be made mandatory for final examination
5. Psychiatry posting in internship has been made mandatory, instead of elective posting
6. The subject to be taught in an integrated manner, especially in Community Medicine.

Undoubtedly, all the above measures are progressive and are to be welcomed. Unfortunately, except for the decision on internship, all other decisions are yet to be implemented. The MCI's decision on compulsory internship for MBBS graduates is a significant step forward.

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