

A mixed-method evaluation of the views of medical teachers on the applicability of the ‘infant and young child feeding chapter’ in Saudi medical colleges

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Background

Lack of sufficient preparation of physicians for the provision of breastfeeding support and counselling has been well-documented. The Saudi framework for medical schools encourages the introduction of health promotion and disease prevention in the undergraduate medical curriculum. The Academy of breastfeeding medicine recommends breastfeeding education to clinicians, starting in the preclinical phase of training. The development of training in breastfeeding medicine for medical students is currently ongoing worldwide. This study was conducted to gain insights into a potential framework for a breastfeeding education curriculum.

Methods

This study was conducted using a qualitative and quantitative approach. Three colleges were included and 12 medical teachers (MTs) were selected from the concerned departments. WHO infant feeding chapter, Saudi code for breast milk substitutes and the questionnaires for three consecutive rounds were e-mailed to the participants. The rounds addressed general opinions of the participants on current breastfeeding education in medical colleges, the WHO infant feeding chapter sessions as a tool for teaching medical students and applicability of the chapter to breastfeeding education in a Saudi setting. The 1st round was done face to face interview. The 2nd and 3rd rounds were carried by e-mail communications. 70% was considered the cutoff agreement.

Table 1: Participant characteristics (N = 12)

Sex	Male	6
	Female	6
Nationality	Saudi	9
	Non-Saudi	3
Specialty	Medical education	3
	Pediatrics	2
	Obstetrics and gynecology	3
Academic position	Family medicine	4
	Anatomy	1
	Physiology	1
University	Lecturer	1
	Assistant professor	3
University	Associate professor/professor	8
	Medical college Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University	4
	King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences	4
	King Saud University	4

Table 2: Themes relating to breastfeeding medicine education for medical students: medical teachers' views

- The competence of the medical students in breastfeeding medicine is not optimal.
- Textbooks used by medical colleges are not rich in breastfeeding medicine content.
- Low or variable level of experience of medical teachers in breastfeeding medicine.
- One curriculum on breastfeeding medicine should be established, regardless of the gender of the medical student.
- Out of respect for the culture, practical clinical training should be increased for female medical students.
- Adoption of a breastfeeding teaching module for medical students with customization to fit the culture and the medical college's curriculum is recommended.
- Breastfeeding medicine education should be integrated throughout the years of the medical college's curriculum. A short, a focused breastfeeding course within one of the major blocks, such as pediatrics or gynecology, should be established.
- Assessment (examination) of medical students in breastfeeding is a must.
- A unique curriculum for medical students that differs from that of other health professions is a controversial subject.

Objectives

- 1) To gather the opinions of medical teachers (MTs) on current breastfeeding medical education.
- 2) to determine their views regarding the application of the WHO infant feeding chapter in the curriculum of Saudi medical colleges.

Results

Twelve MTs participated in the study and their response rates in each round were 100, 83 and 66%, respectively, table 1. The themes were extrapolated from round 1, table 2. Likert scale were used in assessment of participants opinions regarding content of WHO resource in round 2 and 3, table 3.

Table 3: Medical teachers' opinions on the suitability of the content of the WHO infant feeding chapter for Saudi medical colleges, according to a 3-point Likert scale

Sessions with agreement	%		
Session 1: The importance of infant and young child feeding and recommended practices.	80-100%		
Session 3: Complementary feeding.	90%		
Session 7: Management of breast conditions and other breastfeeding difficulties.	70-90%		
Session 8: Mothers' health.	100%		
Session 10: Boxes, tables and pictures.	80-90%		
Sessions with disagreement in selected topics	Disagree N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Agree N (%)
Session 2: The physiological basis of breastfeeding.	Medical students should not learn about position and attachment.		
	5 (50)	2 (20)	3 (30)
Session 4: Management and support of infant feeding in maternity facilities.	Medical students should be taught about breastfeeding support in maternity hospitals.		
	0 (0)	4 (40)	6 (60)
	Medical students should learn in maternity facilities that are accredited as baby-friendly.		
	0 (0)	4 (40)	6 (60)
Session 5: Continuing support for infant and young child feeding.	Medical students are not expected to have skills related to reporting of breastfeeding observation.		
	4 (40)	2 (20)	4 (40)
Session 6: Appropriate feeding in exceptionally difficult circumstances.	Medical students are not expected to learn about management of infant nutrition during disasters, such as war.		
	5 (50)	3 (30)	2 (20)
Session 9: Policy, health system and community actions.	Medical students should understand national standards for breast milk substitutes.		
	2 (20)	2 (20)	6 (60)

Discussion

The motivation behind this research was the lack of a standard framework for breastfeeding education in medical schools within the cultural context of Saudi Arabia. Finding qualified experts in breastfeeding medicine in academia to participate in this study proved challenging. They agreed on most of the sessions of WHO chapter. However, they acknowledged that delivering the full WHO infant feeding chapter in one block would be difficult, and recommended scattering the content throughout the preclinical and clinical education phases. This recommendation was consistent with the findings of another study indicating that the approach to development of the breastfeeding and lactation curriculum for medical students is not dissimilar to that used for studying other organ systems, such as the cardiovascular system or the renal system. The MTs surveyed in this study recommended customization of the WHO infant feeding chapter to suit Saudi culture, with emphasis on the prevalence of breastfeeding in Saudi Arabia, social context, Islamic perspective, complementary food and national policies regarding infant nutrition.

How to improve ?

International experts in breastfeeding medicine like members or fellows from academy of breastfeeding medicine can proposed a curriculum chapter for medical students.

Conclusions

The medical education community should address education of lactation management in more depth than it currently does during undergraduate medical program.

References

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