

Original Article

ASSESSMENT OF MEDICAL, NURSE AND MIDWIFE STUDENTS OF THEIR TRAINING IN COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Summary

This study aimed to investigate the opinion of students of medicine, nursing and midwifery on their training in communication skills as an optional course. The participants included in the study were 126 students altogether. Information was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire. The results showed the level of motivation to participate in the training process, the results desired and achieved by the students and their evaluation of the quality of the training. The respondents were convinced that such training would be an asset for their future work as medical professionals and they were satisfied with the quality of training.

Key words: communication skills, training, medical, nursing and midwifery students

Introduction

Communication between health professionals is a process that remains important despite of constantly increasing technology implementation in making diagnoses and treatment undertaken. Good communication is an important aspect throughout the health care process and involves all members of the medical team [1-7]. That is why the quality of training in communication skills of future medical professionals is very important and studies in this field are aimed at assessing these skills. The methods usually used for data collection are self-administered questionnaires [1, 3-5, 8-13].

The aim of this study was to investigate the opinion of students on communication skills as an optional discipline.

Material and Methods

The study group included students of medicine, nursing and midwifery, participating in communication skills training as an optional course at the Sector of General Medicine, Medical University - Pleven in the 2013/2014 academic year. The study group distribution is shown in Table 1. The method used for data collection was self-administered questionnaire. Data were processed with Statgraphics Plus 4.1 for Windows and Microsoft Office Excel.

Table 1. Participants in the research

Students	Number	Percent (%)
Distribution by specialties:		
Medicine	72	57%
Nurse	22	18%
Midwifery	32	25%
Distribution by years:		
First year students	32	25%
Second year students	72	57%
Third year students	22	18%
Distribution by gender:		
Males	18	14%
Females	108	86%

Results

The students from the whole study group were certain that their training in communication skills is necessary for success in their future career ($\chi^2=0.27$; $p=0.6004$; Figure 1).

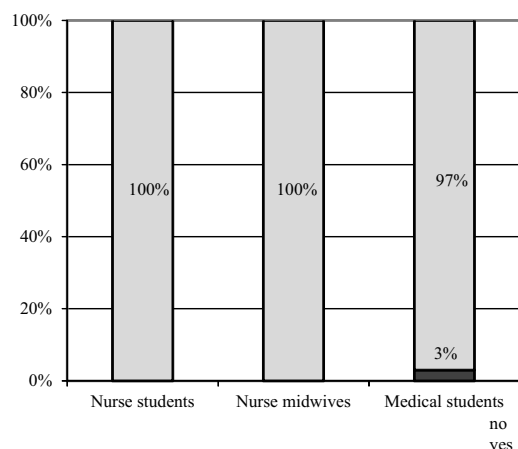


Figure 1. Is communication skills training necessary for your future work?

The students pointed out three main reasons for choosing this course: to be more useful to their patients, to be well prepared as specialists and the realised need of better professional communication skills (Figure 2).

The majority of students answered that they wanted to be able to facilitate the process of starting communication with new patients and be able to deal with difficult patients. The second most popular answer was their desire to improve their communication skills – asking questions, explaining, active listening (Figure 3).

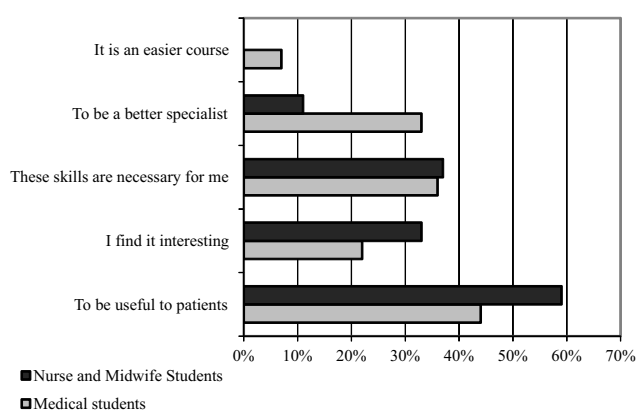


Figure 2. Reasons to choose to study this discipline. Note: The participants have chosen more than one answer.

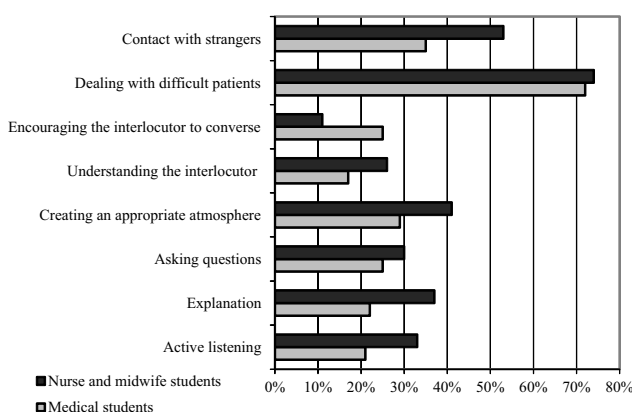


Figure 3. Desired communication skills as a result from the training. Note: The participants have chosen more than one answer.

The preferred form of training was a mixed one – containing both theory and practice (Figure 4).

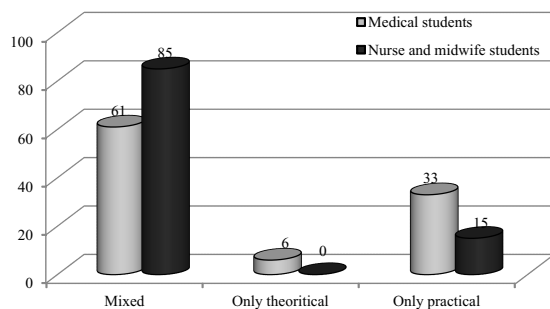


Figure 4. The preferred form of training

Evaluation by the medical students after completion of training:

- Fully corresponding to their preliminary expectations – 36 (50%);
- There were partial differences between reality and expectations – 23 (32%), 4% of this group specified that the differences were positive, as some psychological elements of communication were added, which proved to be interesting for them;
- They had not had any preliminary expectations – 13 (18%).

Level of acquired communication skills was assessed on a 1-10 scale:

- At the beginning of the course – average rating 6.58 ± 0.38 ;
- At the end of the course – average rating 7.95 ± 0.39 ($W=1436$; $p<0.001$).

Improvement of the communication skills in some of the desired aspects is presented in Figure 5.

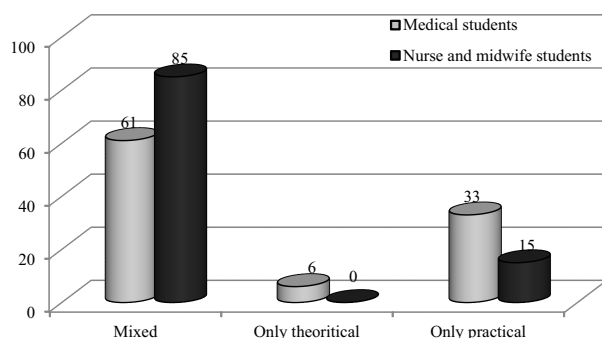


Figure 5. Desired and acquired communication skills during the training. Note: The participants have chosen more than one answer.

When asked for suggestions about improvement of the course in communication skills, 36% of the study group answered that they did not recommend any changes. The majority of the other students suggested that further augmentation of the practice-oriented tasks, role-playing games and cases that simulate real-life situations from everyday practice be used for the confirmation of the communication skills acquired.

Discussion

Our results are similar to those from other studies on the subject [1, 3-5, 7-13] and showed that students from the three specialities assessed the need of this education. They expressed high satisfaction from the course of communication skills. Medical students were highly satisfied with the training, and also pointed out a positive effect on their communication skills in communication in general, especially about establishing a contact with strangers, keeping a suitable atmosphere for a conversation and possessing the basic communication skills for good communication with patients. Although this evaluation is subjective, it shows that the students feel more confident in their own communication skills after the training, which is a prerequisite for being confident and efficient in the process of communication. For most of the participants, the training programmes fully corresponded to their preliminary expectations. Suggestions for improvement involved including more role-play games and cases, simulating real-life situations.

Conclusion

Students from the whole study group recognized the importance of the communication skills course for their future work. Their motivation to complete the training course was high and they would like to receive additional information about:

- socialization with new patients;
- dealing with difficult patients in medical practice;
- improvement of basic communication skills needed for medical consultation.

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