

Outcomes in Medical Education

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Since its inception in 2003, the Asia Pacific Medical Education Conference (APMEC) has focused on one relevant, practical, and contemporary aspect of medical education. The theme for 4th APMEC was carefully determined to be “Outcomes in Medical Education.”

We received many submissions, and this series of articles represents an eclectic mix of innovations and experiments from a growing group of medical educators around the region. Reflecting on the submissions for this theme issue, the Editorial Committee thought of highlighting 2 features that might be of interest to the readers; firstly, defining and measuring outcome in the context of education and, secondly, the importance of contextual knowledge in medical education research.¹⁻¹⁰

“Outcomes in education” is a vast and complex construct that continues to challenge the educators. An idealistic view examines outcomes in medical education from the perspective of patient-related measures. However, given the intricacies surrounding patients’ outcomes, the long interval between any given educational intervention and its potential outcome measurements, some confounding factors, and many biases inherent in the educational ecology, the goal of linking medical education to patients’ outcomes is seldom achieved.

A more pragmatic approach relies on measuring students’ learning outcomes such as satisfaction, change in test scores, and perceived impact of the programme. The attractiveness of this approach is easily evident. Immediate data and feedback allow any necessary adjustment to the innovations to be made, which in turn benefits the proximate users, i.e. the students. Readers will notice the range of outcomes assessed in this special issue on medical education, and may appreciate the diversity as well as complexity surrounding outcome measurements.

The importance of contextual knowledge in educational research and outcome studies cannot be overestimated. A unique distinction of medical education articles reported in the current issue is that these research and outcome studies were initiated and carried out by medical teachers. They were not from pure researchers or ivory-tower academicians. Thus, the authors had the advantage of knowing the ground and identifying issues that are of value to the students and community. This is a major shift from theory-intense research which often has no immediate relevance. By

contrast, the articles presented here are needs-based, practical, and intuitional practice-based. We hope that our readers will find them beneficial and implementable in their own situations.

However, our efforts in advancing the field of medical education should not be limited to descriptive studies. Such studies need to be complemented by more interventional and empiric data-driven studies with stronger theoretical underpinnings. A harmonious balance and happy marriage between theory and practice-based research and outcome studies would be the ultimate goal.

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