

# Problem-based Learning in Medical Education: The Singapore Hybrid<sup>†</sup>

M C E Gwee,\*<sup>BPharm, PhD, MEd</sup>, C H Tan,\*\*<sup>MBBS, M Med (Psych Med), PhD</sup>

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Problem-based learning (PBL) is an innovative educational strategy to enhance student-centred, interactive and integrated learning through intensive small group tutorials. PBL is problem-first learning in which a commonly encountered medical problem serves as the primary focus of and stimulus for learning. Several adaptations have evolved since its implementation at McMaster University in 1969. In 1999, the Singapore medical school implemented PBL as a key feature within its new hybrid curriculum. **Methods:** The review will focus on the educational implications and impact of the present curriculum reform with emphasis on the implementation of PBL within the new hybrid medical curriculum. **Results:** Our early experience in implementing PBL resembles those of several other “traditional” medical schools, namely, a generally favourable and positive response from staff and students mixed with varying degree of anxiety to change. **Conclusion:** Appropriate training and changing the mindsets of staff and students, strong leadership from the Dean and a deep commitment by all concerned are essential to ensure the successful implementation of PBL within a “traditional” medical school. PBL will enhance the quality of medical education and the educational preparation of our students to meet the challenges of future medical practice.

*Ann Acad Med Singapore 2001; 30:356-62*

**Key words:** Curriculum reform, Problem-first learning, Self-directed learning, Shifting educational paradigm, Value-added education

---

\* Professor

\*\* Associate Professor

Department of Pharmacology

Faculty of Medicine

National University of Singapore

Address for Reprints: Dr M C E Gwee, Department of Pharmacology, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore, 10 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 119260.

<sup>†</sup> This review is based on a Symposium Lecture (Why PBL?) delivered by MCE Gwee at the 1<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Conference on Problem-Based Learning in Health Sciences, 20-22 November, 2000, Faculty of Medicine, National University of Singapore, Singapore.