

# Is Problem-Based Learning a Quality Approach to Education in Health Sciences?

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## Abstract

*The Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University has pioneered, experimented and finally excelled in the application of problem-based learning (PBL) as an entire medical curriculum for the past 35 years. However, the general practice of PBL by other medical schools around the globe has progressed slowly. In theory, PBL as an educational philosophy has long been considered as a quality cognitive concept and was adopted by many medical schools via curriculum reform to improve students' learning attitude. In practice, what is the experimental evidence for PBL meeting the expectation of a quality education in health sciences? How do we differentiate problems associated with PBL philosophy per se from those associated with the ways PBL are handled and implemented? I will address these questions from the perspective of the assessment of performance of students, graduates and practising physicians from the PBL track compared to those from the conventional track based on literature information. Ample evidence suggests that PBL is superior in producing more compassionate physicians and graduates with lifelong learning and leadership quality. But, some educators and administrators are still skeptical that the benefits from PBL may be too marginal to justify the resources required in sustaining it. In this presentation, the assessment of PBL, in both theoretical and practical terms, will be discussed using McMaster PBL as a convenient example because of its relatively long history in practising PBL in medical education.*

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