Medical Students at KFMC: Attitudes, Problems, and Challenges

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Background
The Faculty of Medicine (FOM) at King Fahad Medical City (KFMC) is the first medical school in Saudi Arabia that operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health. Four classes have embarked on the medical course thus far. The FOM has 205 students, of whom 27 are females. The goals of the FOM include being responsive to students’ personal and academic needs. Therefore the FOM is keen to evaluate its progress and achievement of its goals and objectives.

Objectives
(1) Perform a survey of KFMC medical students regarding studying medicine, their methods and environments, and their attitudes toward medical school. (2) To investigate the problems and challenges students encounter when studying and dealing with tutors, resources, and PBL.

Methodology
A questionnaire comprising 38 questions was distributed to all medical students in attendance at a specific class or lab. Data were summarized and compared.

Results
The response rate was 73.65% (n=151, 25 females and 126 males). Most students (87.4%) thought the survey was important for them, and over three-fourths supported repeating it annually. Almost three-fourths chose medicine because of hobby and interest, and over half of respondents plan careers in surgical fields. Almost two-thirds of students thought studying with students from different nationalities would enhance the studying process, and over three-fourths believed having multi-nationality doctors improved the teaching process. The biggest challenge to studying medicine was considered by less than half to be “studying in a language other than Arabic,” and over half believed the high school education is insufficient to prepare them to enter the FOM. Although almost two-thirds of the students preferred doctors’ handouts for studying, three-fourths of the students did not select this resource as the most reliable. Similar proportions (37.9% and 37.2%, respectively) of students agreed and disagreed that they established effective studying methods immediately after entering medical school and about one fourth of second year students and above have not yet adopted an effective method for reading and studying. Almost two-thirds believed PBL was adequate to prepare them to enter clinical practice. Considerably more (21.3% vs 12.8%) students preferred attending lectures than PBL discussions, and more than half of the students considered the lectures to be the most effective teaching method. Family encouragement, frequent assessment, competition with colleagues, and greeting from the doctors shared almost equal importance as study motivations. Almost half of them chose good communication skills as the most important characteristic of their tutors. Approximately one-third believe academic mentorship helps and guides students.

Conclusions
Survey results exemplify the positive aspects of the environment and reflect frustrations being experienced by the students. The favorable reception of the survey by the students indicates their interest in providing feedback and being involved. In addition, their expressed concerns may provide a platform for discussion that may lead to a more effective learning environment.

Keywords: medical education, problems and challenges.