

Ethical Issues in the Planning and the Conduct of Escape Rooms in Medical Education

Abstract

Escape rooms in medical education are relatively a novel approach to facilitate critical thinking and decision-making in simulated realistic clinical scenarios among the medical students. The success of escape rooms in the attainment of specified competencies depends on several factors that must be given due consideration for optimizing the overall outcome. Further, there might be multiple ethical concerns that must be given due attention before, during, and after the conduct of such sessions. There is an immense need to integrate ethical considerations while designing and implementing escape rooms in medical schools, as it will aid in the creation of a respectful and encouraging learning atmosphere for the students. In conclusion, escape rooms provide a great learning opportunity for medical students to critically think, engage in teamwork, and learn the art of adaptation depending on the given clinical scenario. However, the successful conduct of such sessions is determined by a wide range of factors, including ethical considerations, and all of them need to be systematically analyzed and measures should be taken to reduce their impact on students.

Keywords: Communication skills, escape room, ethics, medical education, medical students

Introduction

Escape rooms in medical education are relatively a novel approach to facilitate critical thinking and decision-making in simulated realistic clinical scenarios among medical students.^[1] In contrast to the conventional teaching-learning methods, these rooms ensure active engagement and encourage enthusiasm among medical students as they work together to resolve the given challenges in strategically designed escape rooms.^[1,2] Further, the learning becomes joyful and quite relevant to future clinical practice as these designed scenarios have the component of being realistic and expose students to the pressure situation of achieving the target within the predefined time limit.^[2,3] In addition, escape room tends to play a defining role in the development of multiple essential skills, including teamwork, leadership, time management, able to adapt and be flexible depending on the scenario, communication skills, and ability to cope with stress among medical students.^[2,3] Owing to these multiple benefits and the potential of escape rooms in aiding medical students

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to attain both cognitive and noncognitive competencies, there is a definite scope for medical educators to introduce these escape rooms as a part of training medical students.^[1-4] The purpose of this article is to explore the details to be monitored while designing medical escape rooms and identify the potential ethical concerns that must be taken into account, including strategies to respond to them.

Potential Considerations While Designing Medical Escape Room

The success of escape rooms in the attainment of specified competencies depends on several factors that must be given due consideration for optimizing the overall outcome.^[5-8] It is a must that faculty members who will be involved in escape rooms should be trained in the basics and the skills required to effectively conduct the sessions. These include being aware of the intended learning objective that is being targeted for the session, familiarity with the escape room design, knowledgeable about the subject matter, good facilitation and observation skills, possess effective communication skills, skilled to provide effective feedback delivery, and moderate debriefing sessions.^[3] The first and foremost

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consideration is to define the intended learning objectives of the escape room and ascertain their alignment with the curriculum.^[5] In other words, the scenarios and challenges that are designed must target relevant medical concepts and procedures that medical students must learn (one of the core competencies) as a part of their curriculum.^[5,6] The designed scenarios, props, and challenges should be designed in such a way that they remain realistic with which students can find relevance and remain eager to learn (namely, meets with the adult learning principle of relevance).^[6,7] At the same time, the storyline must offer a cohesive and immersive learning opportunity that should keep the students engaged throughout.^[7,8]

Further, the designed challenges should neither be too difficult nor too easy (as students might lose interest), rather they should be balanced, in the sense, that they must be appropriate to the students with varied levels of knowledge and skills.^[6] We must be careful that these escape rooms remain inclusive to students with varied backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles to ensure their active engagement.^[6] Moreover, the escape rooms should be designed in such a way that they are scalable, wherein a greater number of student groups can be subjected.^[5] To optimize the learning outcomes, we must establish a feedback mechanism or debriefing session to reinforce learning and help students identify their areas of weakness.^[9] We must ensure the safety of all students and there should be no physical challenges that can compromise the safety of students, and this essentially requires comprehensive risk assessment. Finally, we must give due consideration to the cost factor (required for the design and implementation) and ensure that the quality of the learning experience is not compromised.^[5,6]

Ethical Considerations in Medical Escape Rooms

The above description suggests that escape rooms have the potential to offer an engaging learning experience to medical students.^[2,3,9] However, there might be multiple ethical concerns that must be given due attention before, during, and after the conduct of such sessions. Before conducting the session, we must obtain informed consent from students after explaining to them about the nature of the activity, and the potential stressors, including emotional hurdles. To avoid any confusion, it is the best to specify the roles of each student from different disciplines, as it will aid in maintaining ethical boundaries.^[10] This becomes crucial to address power dynamics, which might emerge owing to the variability in the professional hierarchy and might compromise the learning environment.^[10,11] Students should be given the option to refuse or come out of any specific simulated scenario if they find it difficult to cope with, as this will give them a feeling of freedom to decide.

It is quite essential that we must preserve the personal details shared by students during escape room sessions and thus keep all the information confidential. Further,

the designed challenges and scenarios should not result in physical harm (that might result due to overcrowding, falls, or physical exertion, especially among students who are not well) or psychological harm (which can occur because of the anxiety and stress related to time pressure, or due to competitive pressure among peers, etc.) to the students and by all means ensure their safety, whereas they are in escape rooms.^[4-6] These harms can be avoided by limiting the number of students who are participating in each session, monitoring the physical space for any potential hurdles, running a pilot run before the actual session to identify the potential vulnerabilities, educating students that the task has to be completed through collaboration and teamwork and they will be assessed for their collaborative performance and not individual brilliance.

It is very essential that we train students to demonstrate professional behavior while in escape rooms that have to be in alignment with the expected standards of the medical profession.^[10] The teachers who are involved in the designing of scenarios must ensure that they are culturally sensitive and should not be offensive against the prevailing customs of students.^[4,5] In continuation, these rooms have to be inclusive, in terms of accommodating the needs of students with different abilities and perspectives, to enable them to participate in the scenario without any reluctance and continue their learning.^[1,9]

Considering the possibility that students might experience some emotional feelings in the escape room, a debriefing session must be kept after the exposure.^[7] This debriefing session will not only give a platform for everyone to discuss their experiences but even give an opportunity to teachers to discuss the concerns of students, including offering psychological support (if required).^[7,8] Moreover, the assessment methods that are employed to measure critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills should be objective and transparent to ensure fairness in assessment.^[8,9] In fact, teachers should be also trained in the do's and don'ts for carrying out assessments in an objective manner. One of the crucial considerations is that educators must not use these escape rooms for entertainment, rather the entire session must be planned with specific learning objectives in mind, which in turn should be in alignment with the medical curriculum.^[5] In short, there is an immense need to integrate ethical considerations while designing and implementing escape rooms in medical schools, as it will aid in the creation of a respectful and encouraging learning atmosphere for the students.^[4-6]

Conclusion

Escape rooms provide a great learning opportunity for medical students to critically think, engage in teamwork, and learn the art of adaptation depending on the given clinical scenario. However, the successful conduct of such sessions is determined by a wide range of factors, including ethical considerations, and all of them need to be

systematically analyzed and measures should be taken to reduce their impact on students.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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