

Study Habits of Highly Effective Medical Students: A Medical Student's Perspective [Letter]

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Dear editor

I have read the article 'Study Habits of Highly Effective Medical Students' by Bin Abdulrahman et al.¹ The authors provide an interesting insight into the studying habits of medical students and I want to present my comments on certain aspects of this study.

This article identifies key strategies medical students use in order to study and prepare for exams and briefly identifies the use of group study to practise for OSCEs (Table 3).¹ However, it is not clearly evident how studying habits differ when preparing for written examinations in comparison to practical examinations. In the UK, we have both written examinations and Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) which assess history taking, physical examination and communication skills. Studies have found that working in small groups that includes role play and interviewing is beneficial in terms of teaching history taking to medical students.² Furthermore, it is a feasible suggestion to make that developing history taking and physical examination skills not only to prepare for exams but to develop one's skills throughout medical school would be more difficult without the use of peers. Tolsgaard found that clinical skills training was highly beneficial when peer-learning activities were used in a clinical environment,³ therefore it would be interesting to assess if students adapted peer-learning as a studying strategy for practical examinations and if this proved effective in examination results.

In addition, the authors commented on the use of studying alone for knowledge retention; however, the study did not mention exactly how students used notes or other materials for knowledge retention. Various studies have been conducted to identify the best way to learn a substantial quantity of information, and it has been found that an efficient way for long-term retention is through testing oneself, using active recall to retrieve learned information and retesting the facts at increasing time intervals.⁴ Again, it would be interesting to assess if students were knowingly or unknowingly using these strategies in their studying habits by asking them if they tested themselves after learning a topic, if they used flashcards to recall information and how frequently they repeated a topic in specific time intervals.

In summary, Bin Abdulrahman et al¹ has provided us with a useful insight into the most frequently used studying strategies used by medical students in order to consolidate skills and knowledge and prepare for examinations. However,

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additional information would be useful to differentiate between certain strategies used depending on the nature of examinations. Furthermore, it would be interesting to evaluate how students studied not only in terms of materials used but also in relation to evidence-based methods such as testing oneself, using active recall and repeating at intervals.

Disclosure

The author reports no conflicts of interest for this communication.

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