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Training medical students in global health education through framework of entrustable professional activities

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Abstract:

Global health education aims to improve health standards and achieve health equity by reducing health disparities across national boundaries. In the context of global health education, entrustable professional activities (EPAs) provide a clear framework for defining specific, observable activities that a student must be able to perform independently, without supervision. To equip medical students with global health-related competencies, framing EPAs becomes crucial. This task begins with identifying the core competencies essential for effective global health practice. In conclusion, EPAs are expected to play a defining role in global health education. The need of the hour is to engage all stakeholders, systematically select the EPAs that are crucial for delivering global health education, and train medical students in the desired competencies to empower them to deliver effective healthcare services.

Keywords:

Entrustable professional activities, global health, medical education

Introduction

Global health education is an interdisciplinary domain that aims to improve health standards and achieve health equity by reducing health disparities across national boundaries.^[1] This vision of global health education cannot be accomplished by the health sector alone and requires support from other sectors, such as nursing, social sciences, and the environment, as the involvement of different sectors eventually determines the development of comprehensive and sustainable health interventions.^[1,2] Through this process, students learn about the potential determinants responsible for these disparities, highlighting the need to train them to address these issues effectively.^[1,3] From the perspective of medical education, we must train and equip medical students—who will soon become integral members of the future health workforce—with the

desired knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to address complex health challenges in resource-constraint settings.^[4,5]

Role of EPAs in Global Health Education

Entrustable professional activities (EPAs) have been widely acknowledged and used for training medical students in various subject-specific competencies worldwide.^[6] In the context of health education, EPAs provide a clear framework for defining specific, observable activities that students must be able to perform independently, without supervision.^[7] These EPAs help medical students acquire competencies crucial for global health practice, such as cultural competence, understanding healthcare delivery systems, ethical dilemmas and decision-making, and more.^[7] As all framed EPAs reflect real-world activities, medical students gradually develop the practical skills that are indispensable and critical for global

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health-related work.^[7,8] Global health-related EPAs are designed to prepare medical students to work in low-resource settings and equip them with the ability to adapt and efficiently engage in problem-solving.^[7] Some global health-related EPAs are listed in Table 1.

Upon the assessment of each EPA, the assessor provides students with constructive and actionable feedback, helping them address their weaknesses.^[9-11] The provided feedback serves as a personalized learning path, allowing students to consolidate their strengths and focus on improving their areas of weakness, ensuring that all students attain the desired competencies regardless of their starting point or learning style.^[11] EPAs emphasize that students become accountable for their learning, which translates into preparing them to confidently take responsibility for clinical assignments.^[12] Furthermore, as EPAs related to global health often require collaboration across different sectors, students recognize the importance of interprofessional practice within the health sector, while also enhancing their teamwork and communication skills—both of which are crucial for delivering effective healthcare services.^[7,13]

Global Health EPAs: Selection Criteria

The first and foremost criterion is that the selected EPA must be relevant to global health practice and designed with consideration for the workplace environment where students will deliver clinical care upon the completion of their training.^[7] At the same time, these EPAs should align with the core competencies essential for global health practice and must effectively contribute to the attainment of educational goals.^[7,14] The selected EPA

must be feasible to implement and assess, with decisions made based on the availability of resources, teachers, and the learning environment.^[14,15] Moreover, the tasks identified in the selected EPA must be observable and measurable, enabling teachers to accurately assess the EPAs and provide individualized feedback accordingly.^[11,15,16] The selected EPA must also be customized to local contexts, taking into account the cultural factors and available resources.^[7]

Process of Designing EPAs for Global Health

In our vision to make medical students competent in global health-related competencies, framing EPAs becomes crucial.^[7] This task begins with identifying the core competencies that are vital for effective global health practice.^[7,15] It is critical to perform a thorough needs assessment to identify specific needs and challenges that are relevant on a global scale, such as understanding epidemiology, the functioning of healthcare delivery systems, cultural factors influencing health, and resource constraints in different regions.^[7,14-16] These activities, including the development of comprehensive and relevant EPAs, cannot be effectively accomplished without engaging all concerned stakeholders in the process.^[17,18] This should be followed by breaking down the core competencies into specific, observable, and measurable tasks that students should be able to perform, ensuring alignment with the overall medical curriculum.^[19]

For each framed EPA, it is essential to define the tasks that need to be performed, the settings in which they should be conducted, the expected level of proficiency depending on the stage of the medical student, and the resources required to complete the specific EPA.^[19] Additionally, rubrics with milestones should be developed for each level, along with the extent of supervision required, depending on the improvement in the performance of the student.^[20] Conducting a pilot run of framed EPAs with a small group of students and gathering their feedback regarding clarity, relevance, and feasibility is always beneficial; based on this feedback, the EPAs should be improved.^[21] We should also identify appropriate assessment tools that can be used to effectively measure different EPAs.^[10]

Conclusion

In conclusion, EPAs are expected to play a defining role in global health education. The need of the hour is to engage all stakeholders, systematically select EPAs that are crucial for delivering global health education, and train medical students in the desired competencies to empower them to deliver effective healthcare services.

Table 1: Examples of global health-related EPAs

Global health-related EPA

Developing and implementing surveillance systems to monitor and respond to disease outbreaks in various populations
Coordinating efforts during public health emergencies, such as natural disasters and pandemics
Planning, implementing, and evaluating immunization campaigns to improve coverage in high-risk populations
Creating and delivering culturally appropriate health education programs to promote the adoption of healthy behaviors
Conducting holistic assessments to identify health needs, resources, and priorities in specific populations
Planning and executing research studies to address key global health issues, including data collection, analysis, and dissemination of findings
Leading the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of health programs to ensure they meet their objectives
Engaging in policy advocacy and stakeholder collaboration to address social determinants of health and reduce health disparities
Delivering high-quality clinical care in low-resource environments
Training local healthcare providers to enhance the quality and sustainability of health services

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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