

Dermatology Education: Confidence of Final Year Medical Students

J. Hynes^{1,2}, S. Harney², M E. Abdalla², M. O’Kane¹.

1. Department of Dermatology, Beaumont Hospital, Beaumont Rd., Dublin 9, Ireland.
2. Education and Health Sciences, School of Medicine, University of Limerick, Dooradoyle, Co. Limerick, Ireland.

Dear Editor,

The National Clinical Programme for Dermatology advisory group of 2020 reported that 54% of the Irish population is affected in some way by a dermatology condition, with one third requiring medical care. It was also estimated that up to 20% of GP consultations are for skin specific reasons¹. Skin disorders are seen commonly in both adult and paediatric medicine, with many patients being treated by non-dermatologists². Despite the ubiquity of dermatology seen throughout medicine, evidence suggests that students are not receiving adequate dermatology education in Ireland³. We aimed to investigate the confidence levels of final year medical students in relation to curricular dermatology topics in an Irish University.

Final year medical students attending the University Of Limerick were invited to complete a questionnaire relating to their impressions of dermatology, their dermatology education and confidence in certain curricular dermatology topics. Confidence was assessed on a Likert scale questionnaire with free text questions undergoing a conceptual analysis. 20 students completed the questionnaire, 60% (n=12) were female and 40% (n=8) were male. All students had previous lectures in dermatology and 65% (n=13) reported dermatology exposure in their 18-week general practice placement. 100% of students considered dermatology a valuable specialty to have knowledge of, even for non-dermatologists.

Students reported themselves to be confident in areas such as the recognition and management of psoriasis or atopic dermatitis, and the recognition of urticaria or Steven Johnsons Syndrome/Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis. However, they did not report confidence in recognising and managing a drug rash, identifying erythema multiforme, safely prescribing topical corticosteroids, or the use of terminology describing primary and secondary characteristics of skin lesions. 0% of students felt their dermatology education had adequately prepared them to diagnose and manage prevalent dermatology conditions. Students self-reported confidence in the management of psoriasis and atopic dermatitis, though were not confident in the use of topical corticosteroids. This is an interesting result as topical

corticosteroids play a relatively large role in the management of mild to moderate psoriasis and eczema⁴. This may highlight a lack of understanding and possibly a “pseudo-confidence” relating to these conditions. The conceptual analysis of the free text answers showed that students wanted more emphasis on common/primary care focused dermatology issues such as tinea, scabies, rosacea etc. They also referenced a dearth of dermatology exposure during their clinical years and expressed interest in obtaining dermatology experience at hospital level.

The results of our survey indicate that students have a self-reported uncertainty in a number of key areas of dermatology. As the referral numbers to secondary dermatology care is predicted to increase and the service gap widens, non-dermatologists will likely be required to manage more skin conditions to compensate for this gap¹. It is therefore important to ensure that new graduates have a firm foundation in dermatology. Students have demonstrated insight highlighting areas of dermatology that they feel require more focus and this may form a solid basis for plans to build on dermatology education and improve student confidence going forward.

Declarations of Conflicts of Interest:

None declared.

Corresponding Author:

Jason Hynes,
Department of Dermatology,
Beaumont Hospital,
Beaumont Rd.,
Dublin 9,
Ireland.
E-Mail: hynes.jason89@gmail.com

References:

1. Group NA. National Clinical Programme for Dermatology, A Model of Care for Ireland 2020 [Available from: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/cspd/ncps/dermatology/resources/national-clinical-programme-for-dermatology-a-model-of-care-for-ireland.pdf>].
2. Landis ET, Davis SA, Taheri A, Feldman SR. Top dermatologic diagnoses by age. *Dermatol Online J.* 2014;20(4):22368.

3. Kelly A, Hennessy C, Ryan C. Unsatisfactory level of dermatology undergraduate education in newly qualified Irish doctors. Irish medical journal. 2018;111(4):746.
4. Bologna JL, Schaffer JV, Duncan KO, Ko CJ. Dermatology essentials: Elsevier Health Sciences; 2014.