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Student's role* in the development of an "optional subjects-line" in a medical curriculum.

* indicated by yellow background colour

Context

- **New medical curriculum at Ghent University (1999):** problem-based and integrated.
 - Established content: no possibility of electives.
 - Possibility of continuous evolution through permanent reflection and evaluation.
- **"Student's Association on Education" (SWOP):** coordinates all activities of students concerning medical education.
- **Students experience a deficit:** no formal opportunity to gain more in-depth knowledge on an individually chosen subject.

Electronic survey (SWOP - March 2004)
5th year students (n=85).
▪ 88% response
▪ "Tropical medicine" (35%) and "medical French" (39%) were popular items

To gain inspiration:
▪ visit to Faculty of Medicine of Maastricht University (SWOP - November 2003)
▪ literature

Interventions and Results

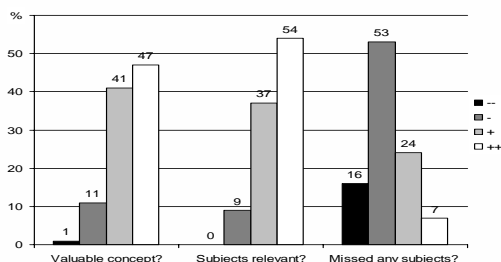
Round-table meeting (April 2004):
Students and teachers reflect together on this topic
↓
Difficult to decide what subjects can be optional
→ introduce electives gradually
↓
**Start with 1 week of electives in the 5th year (1)
+ possibility to suggest own subjects (2)**

(1)

13 different subjects were organized, most of them introducing new topics in the curriculum. (February 2005)

- "Tropical medicine" and "developmental psychology" were popular choices
- Other topics include: medical education, introduction to some surgical disciplines, InterDis, continuity of care in first line, ...

▪ **Evaluation (SWOP):**
67% response (n=111), very enthusiastic



(2)

Community-oriented "health-education" project in a multicultural technical school in Ghent, organized by students. (October 2004)



- Children were introduced in themes as "louses", "first aid", "menstruation and puberty", ...
- Students compiled a folder with teaching material. This can be used by other students in the future.
- **Evaluation of knowledge and satisfaction of the children:** organized by students themselves (n=40)
 - 79% of the answers on a little exam were correct
 - 93% of the children enjoyed the day very much (☺)

Conclusions

- **If an encouraging environment is created, students can play an important role in improvement and permanent evaluation of medical curricula.**
- The project we present is still in its infancy, is **limited** both in time and subjects and has many shortcomings. We work on the development of a complete 'Exploration-continuum', both deepening existing subjects and offering new topics.
- Electives give students the possibility to deepen their knowledge in particular fields and attribute a personal tinge to their education. This might **enhance the motivation** and involvement towards their studies and future profession.
- If some educational aim can be achieved through different ways, we believe one must seek to acknowledge these different ways in a curriculum. However, the most difficult step in organizing optional subjects seems **"to opt for it"**.