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Reflection on Peer Assisted Learning at PAHS

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ABSTRACT

Peer tutoring is an organized learning experience in which one student serves as the teacher or tutor, and one is the learner or tutee. Peer-teachers and their students share a similar knowledge base and learning experience, which allows the peer-teachers to use language that their learners understand and to explain concepts at an appropriate level. Peer-teachers and student-learners also share a similar social context because of their similar social roles, and because of this, student learners feel more at ease with a peer teacher than with a senior clinician. Peer tutoring is a beneficial way for students to learn from each other in the classroom and in small groups, so benefit is not only for the tutee but also to the tutor, predominantly through the development of their own clinical and teaching skills and from the positive feedback obtained by their tutees, thus creating a highly pleasant learning atmosphere and a win-win situation for all.

Keywords: peer assisted learning (PAL), PBL, tutor

INTRODUCTIONS

Peer tutoring is a program to help students who require additional assistance in academic subjects. Students are tutored by upper year students who have successfully completed the course. Peer tutoring is students helping students. Peer tutoring offers assistance for students having difficulties in a specific course.^{1,2} Problem Based Learning (PBL) is one of the key teaching learning methodology in Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS). Peer tutoring can enhanced the in-depth learning along with PBL.³ International interest in peer-teaching and peer-assisted learning (PAL) during undergraduate medical programs has grown in recent years, reflected both in literature and in practice.^{4,5}

TARGET GROUP

PAHS is newly established academy with dedication to improve the health status of the people of Nepal by producing doctors who are willing and able to provide health care in rural Nepal. When we were in basic sciences, there were so many learning issues for PBL and our discussion mainly focused on clinical aspects. After finishing the complete course of basic sciences we felt we need some guidance for the junior students. Though teachers were present for all the time but hesitance and feeling of being inferior in class, many of us cannot ask questions and discussed with teacher in class. There used to be so many issues which remained unanswered. As we were the first batch, we didn't have our seniors for the guidance, so we thought we will not let this happen to our juniors and started the peer-teaching and peer-assisted learning (PAL) in our medical school.

Peer tutoring and PAL is useful for all level of students. We do have some form of peer tutoring like learning in groups or PBL itself, but they were not fruitful for the needy students. In many of the medical schools, there are scenarios like students who have good relation with senior students get benefited during exam preparation time. So our peer tutoring can reach up to the all juniors who are interested. We are especially focusing on students who are not able to complete exit exam like basic science comprehensive examination and clinical science comprehensive examination. Our targeted students are students who have just started their basic sciences and one to one peer tutoring session for students who have not completed their exit exam. We are also planning to do examination skills for the third year students where they can learn and practice adequate practical skills.

METHODS

We started these tutoring sessions by discussing with the third and fourth batch students. They also showed us the same enthusiasm towards our program. List of the tutors were prepared one week prior to the actual peer tutoring sessions, usually from final year medical students and fourth year medical students. We select the different topics after discussing with the 1st year medical students one week prior, so that both tutor and learner have sufficient time to prepare about the topics. We select more than one tutor for a same topic but only one will be responsible for running the session was main tutor for that topic and others helped.

During peer tutoring session, students are divided into small groups of 10 members and session was run by 1 tutor. Other silent tutors assisted the main tutor if there was confusion. Students asked questions in between as this was primarily discussion session. Normally, a session was for 30-45 minutes and in a day maximum four sessions. We have completed six sessions till now and the number of participants are increasing with each session.

PLAN

Monitoring the effectiveness and productivity of tutoring sessions is a necessity. We can sustain it by involving a large number of students as tutor and regular supervision and monitoring from the faculties. We are taking regular written feedback from student to improve it. It would be more beneficial for the tutor if there were tutor training session by the academy, so that the creativity of tutor can be also improved. This can be accomplished by quizzing students on the topic they have covered or by conducting short MCQs by tutor, These sessions will help for the participants to monitor their progress by themselves and examination team can follow up the participants and assess their improvement and if some students are having constantly low grades then, they should be encouraged to attend tutoring session. Monitoring can be continued by having students monitor themselves, for example, by having the tutor keep track of correct and incorrect answers by making marks on a card. The results from each monitoring card from a tutoring session can then be used to fill in a progress chart which, over time, will be an indicator of progress.

CONCLUSIONS

Here is an old saying: "To teach is to learn twice." Peer assisted learning will help us all to develop the competence and knowledge to both senior and juniors by learning together. These sessions will also increase the respect, love and friendly environment among the inter batch students which will help to decrease the conflict and ego. These sessions will also be helpful to increase the social skills like sense of teamwork, brotherhood and communication skills. It would be an example for other medical school.

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