Model construction by students within an integrated medical curriculum

Abstract

Background: This paper presents our experience of running a special study module (SSM) in the second semester of the first year of our 5-year medical programme, worth 10 percent of that semester's assessment, in which each student constructs an individually selected model illustrating a specific aspect of the teaching course. Method: Each student conceptualises and develops his or her model, to clarify a specific aspect of medical teaching. The use of non-traditional materials in construction is strongly encouraged. Six weeks later, each student presents their model for assessment by four first-year academic teaching staff. The student is quizzed about the concepts that he or she presents, the mode of construction and the materials used. Results: The students' projects broadly cover the disciplines of physiology, biochemistry and anatomy, but are somewhat biased towards anatomy. Students spend on average about 14 hours planning and building their models, at a time when they are busy with other teaching activities. The marks awarded for the projects closely follow a normal distribution. A survey suggests that most students enjoy the exercise and feel that it has enhanced their learning and understanding. Discussion: It is clear from the wide variety of different topics, models and materials that students are highly resourceful in their modelling. Creative activity does not generally play a substantial part in medical education, but is of considerable importance. The development of their models stimulates, informs and educates the constructors, and provides a teaching resource for later use in didactic teaching. © Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2011.