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 10percent 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 14hours 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.