

Faculty development program: Way to excellence

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A B S T R A C T

Introduction: The importance of faculty development programs (FDP) to improve teaching effectiveness has been emphasized in recent years. Our endeavors to improve teaching ways at Shifa College of Medicine, include development of student feedback mechanisms, professional development programs, and research into teaching. New trends taking place in academic medicine were accommodated by modification of faculty development model.

Methods: With an aim to assess the perceptions of faculty about FDP at Shifa College of Medicine we gathered views of faculty, by administering questionnaire, conducting focus group and individual interviews.

Results: More than half of faculty (51%-83%) agreed with various items related to teaching and learning concepts, 79% believed that they learned assessment methods. 73% agreed that it was a source of introduction to new educational strategies. Sixty-eight percent agreed that FDP helped to improve skills in teaching of ethics and professionalism. Results of focus group discussion show that faculty found program helpful in their grooming and development and it made them more knowledgeable. Views from individual interviews stated that faculty development program has contributed towards learning.

Conclusion: In conclusion FDP at Shifa College of Medicine is valued by faculty. It has contributed towards excellence in teaching. This program should be continued with an endeavor to improve it further.

Keywords: Faculty, teaching, learning

Introduction

The importance of faculty development programs to improve the teaching effectiveness has been emphasized in recent years.¹ These programs are developed to improve the standard of teaching^{2,3} and mostly focus on enhancing the abilities of medical faculty as teachers.¹ Faculty development is defined by Wilkerson and Irby "as

a tool for improving the educational vitality of our institutions through attention to the competencies needed by individual teachers and to the institutional policies required to promote academic excellence".⁴ An effective faculty development program improves the quality of teaching.⁵ Training of faculty can positively impact the

teaching competencies leading to improved teaching practices^{6,7,8} Faculty development programs help to enrich the knowledge and skills of teachers.⁹ Clinical skills and knowledge alone do not necessarily make a good teacher, therefore more programs focusing on teaching skills are required for medical teachers.¹⁰ Faculty development program must address the needs of the participants¹¹ to ensure faculty participation and interest.¹² The areas to be addressed may be identified through formal need assessment¹³ or through informal encounters with the faculty, taking the institutional goals into consideration.¹⁴ Shifa College of Medicine (SCM), a constituent college of Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University has always laid a great emphasis on acquiring able and committed faculty, and a continuing program for professional growth and development for its faculty has remained a top priority for the college.

SCM shifted from discipline based to system based integrated modular curriculum which required training of the faculty for skills and competence to adopt new strategies. The faculty development program was modified, keeping in view the curricular philosophy of SCM, which is student centered, constructivist, collaborative, lifelong learning, Integrated/ clinical relevance and critical thinking. This study was designed to describe the evolution of faculty development program at Shifa College of Medicine and assess the views of the faculty on effectiveness of this program.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Describe the evolution of faculty development program (FDP) at Shifa College of Medicine.
2. Assess the views of the faculty on effectiveness of faculty development program.

Methods

Study was approved by the Institutional Review Board and Ethics Committee of the institution. Mixed methods approach was used to increase validity of the findings.

Record of the faculty development program at Shifa College of Medicine was retrieved from Department of Health Professionals Education (DHPE). Faculty development program at SCM includes faculty development seminars, workshops, post graduate

studies, and research and faculty participation in national and international conferences.

Data regarding perceptions of the faculty on faculty development sessions was collected through questionnaire, focus group and interviews. A feedback questionnaire using five point Likert scale was administered to the junior and senior faculty. Focus group discussion was also conducted with multidisciplinary group of faculty members, and in addition individual interviews were conducted with senior faculty members.

Results

Although faculty development program was initiated at Shifa College of Medicine in 1999, regular scheduling of the sessions was implemented in 2002. Last Saturday of every month is allocated for a two hours' duration faculty development seminar that is mandatory for all the faculty members. In the initial years of this program, most of the sessions included presentations on various professional and educational aspects. A move from subject based to system based integrated modular curriculum was directed towards interactive teaching and self-directed learning. The instructional approaches increased the emphasis on problem-solving, interpersonal skills and attitude. New trends and profound transformations taking place in academic medicine made remodeling of our faculty development program necessary. To accommodate these transitions major overall changes in faculty development were brought about and currently workshops and hands on activities have become predominant. Workshops are planned according to the needs identified during various sessions. Various faculty development seminars revolved around different themes which included teaching and learning concepts, needs assessment, technology, assessment (formative & summative), program evaluation, learning strategies, curriculum planning & development, quality in medical education, innovations (EBM, professionalism/ethics, humanities), medical research, community based education, learning environment, patient safety.

Table 1: Themes discussed in the faculty development seminars

FDP Themes	No of sessions under the identified themes
Teaching and learning concepts	27
Needs assessment	02
Technology	03
Assessment (formative & summative)	37
Program Evaluation	22
Learning Strategies	08
Curriculum Planning & Development	25
Quality in Medical Education	31
Innovations (EBM, Professionalism/Ethics, Humanities)	20
Medical Research	13
Community Based Education	04
Learning Environment	02
Patient safety	02

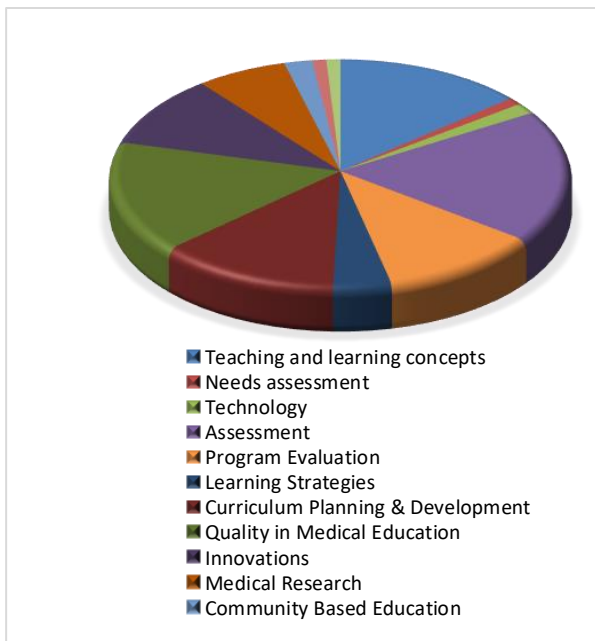


Figure 1: Seminars held under identified themes

Faculty was motivated to carry out research and this resulted in a significant number of scholarly publications in prestigious journals. Faculty was encouraged and

supported to participate in various national and international conferences and to join postgraduate medical education programs. The evolution of faculty development program into a comprehensive, multilevel program helped in promoting excellence in teaching and research. These endeavors led to the development of a well-established department of health professions education, which functions to plan and organize the educational activities.

Questionnaire was administered to 92 faculty members which included both senior and junior faculty from multiple specialties using five point Likert scale. Strongly agree and agree were merged and strongly disagree and agree were also merged for the purpose of analysis.

More than half of the faculty (51%-83%) agreed with various items related to teaching and learning concept. Seventy-four per cent agreed that the FDP provided opportunities to improve basic facilitation skills. Fifty-five per cent said it was a source of motivation to improve academic qualifications. Eighty-three percent thought sharing of teaching experiences helped them learn and 68% agreed that discussions on student's feedback helped to reflect on one's performance. Seventy-four percent believed that it helped to reframe the traditional thinking of faculty. Fifty-one percent agreed that it encouraged change as an essential component for scholarship in teaching / learning process, and 68 % agreed that it helped to improve communication skills.

Fifty-eight percent thought it helped to identify their areas of improvement. Only 29% agreed with the fact that FDP improved skills in use of information technology and computer in education, 40% disagreed, whereas 32% remained neutral. Seventy-nine percent said they learned assessment methods through workshops. Sixty-seven percent agreed that it introduced learner centered teaching behavior, and helped to increase skills in collaborative teaching. Eighty percent and 73% respectively agreed that they learned various learning strategies and that they were introduced to new educational strategies. Only 32% said it helped to improve skills in teaching of bedside and clinical teaching, 33% remained neutral and 34% disagreed. Fifty-nine percent said it enhanced skills in curriculum planning and module design, 68% found it helpful in developing

educational objectives and blue printing. Seventy-four percent believed that it provides opportunities to learn recent advances, emerging trends and issues in the field of medical education, and 57% found it a source of sharing experiences of national/international exposure. Sixty-five percent said it introduced them to evidence based medicine. Forty-two percent believed it promoted personal growth of faculty through literature, poetry and religion, 68% agreed that FDP helped to improve teaching skills of ethics and professionalism and 53% thought it motivated for research. Forty-four percent found it to enhance medical writing skills, research methodology, scientific and medical education research. Sixty-eight percent thought it promoted learning environment.

Only 20% agreed, 35% were neutral and 25% disagreed, regarding the role of FDP in community based education. Focus group was conducted with multidisciplinary faculty members. The participants believed that faculty development program at SCM has been a useful experience for them. Sessions on learning strategies and assessment were appreciated. Some of the workshops clearly made a significant difference in performance. This program was said to have helped in grooming and development of faculty, and in making them more knowledgeable in the field of medical education. They thought that the faculty shared their experiences and innovative ideas through this program. It promoted team work and helped the faculty reflect on their performance. Sessions on arts and humanities were appreciated by the faculty. It was believed that FDP has definitely contributed towards the progress of faculty; it helped to improve their teaching skills and has helped the new teachers to learn various methods of teaching.

Individual interviews were conducted with four senior faculty members. They believed that the objective of FDP was to train the faculty to deliver curriculum optimally, it is organized to familiarize the faculty with learner centered approach, keep up with new trends and improve teaching and assessment.

"I was introduced to new learning strategies and assessment."

When asked if they see the objectives being fulfilled they responded that some of the objectives have been achieved like teaching strategies and assessment

methods while other objectives like promotion of research have only been addressed partially. The faculty was able to learn and switch over from traditional to modular curriculum with the help of faculty development program.

"I have learned from these sessions most of the time."

Regarding the challenges faced when FDP was started, they said that it was a challenge to keep the faculty interested and engaged during sessions. Initially there was resistance for a change in the modality of curricular delivery, but over a period of time orientation through FDP helped in decreasing the resistance and now there is more acceptance. In response to a question about the contribution of FDP towards teaching excellence, they said that it has definitely contributed towards teaching excellence. This program should continue and should be further improved.

"It helps in grooming the faculty specially the new comers."

Discussion

Recently there has been a significant increase in number of medical colleges in the region, however maintaining the quality of medical education is a big challenge.¹⁵ In addition to the implementation of measures for quality assurance in emerging medical schools, evaluation of the programs already adopted in established medical colleges is an essential component for maintaining the standard. We gathered views of the faculty about faculty development program at Shifa College of Medicine. The results show that the FDP was well received by our faculty. Similar findings were reported in a systematic review of faculty development initiatives designed to improve teaching effectiveness in medical education where faculty development programs were found to be rated high for satisfaction.¹ allies and Herman found a positive impact of educational development.⁵ Traditionally the role of medical teacher has been to provide information to the students. The teacher of today is expected to be an efficient facilitator, curriculum and course planner, resource material creator, student assessor, mentor and program evaluator.¹⁶ Harden and Crosby described roles of a teacher as information provider, resource developer, planner, assessor, facilitator and role model.¹⁷ Our faculty development model helps to prepare the faculty for these

roles. Most of our faculty agreed that they were provided opportunities to improve their basic facilitation skills. More than half of the faculty said they learned curriculum planning and module design. Our faculty acknowledged learning of assessment strategies through FDP. It is important for the teacher to be aware of the new teaching methodologies that are being practiced in modern world, which include a shift from conventional teaching to small group teaching, problem based learning, innovative curriculum models and changes in assessment methods and tools.¹⁸ The evolutionary change in FDP over the years with change in curricular delivery strategies was taken positively. Majority of our faculty felt that they learned various learning strategies through FDP. For successful implementation of curricular reforms, it is necessary to prepare the faculty for new teaching and assessment methodologies.¹⁹ Our FDP focused on preparing the faculty for teaching in integrated modular curriculum, which ensured smooth transition and the faculty agreed with usefulness of the program in this respect. Our findings show that the faculty perceive FDP to have improved the teaching and research skills of the faculty. This is in consistence with the findings of a systematic review and meta-analysis which shows significant impact of faculty development programs on the knowledge and skills of the faculty.⁹ Teaching in medical schools is an important responsibility and with changing trends in medical education good faculty development initiatives have become a need of the day.²⁰ Our FDP provided an opportunity to learn the recent advances, emerging trends and issues in the field of medical education. It is suggested that role modeling is the best way to inculcate professionalism in students.²¹ Our FDP included seminars on professionalism and ethics.

Conclusion

Faculty development program at SCM is valued by the faculty. It has proved to be helpful in educating the faculty on innovative strategies and new trends in medical education, thus making them competent for efficient delivery of curriculum. It has contributed towards excellence in teaching. However constant improvement is an essential requirement to maintain high standards. This program should be continued with an endeavor to improve it further.

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