



Obtaining a clearer perspective on the differently abled: a case study from a Caribbean medical school

Peer review status:

No

Corresponding Author:

Dr. P Ravi Shankar,
Professor, American International Medical University, Beausejour Road - Saint Lucia

Submitting Author:

Dr. P Ravi Shankar,
Professor, American International Medical University, Beausejour Road - Saint Lucia

Other Authors:

Dr. Abner James,
Assistant Professor, American International Medical University, Department of Basic Medical Sciences - Saint Lucia

Dr. Ramanan Balasubramaniam,
Associate Professor, American International Medical University, Department of Basic Medical Sciences - Saint Lucia

Article ID: WMC005499

Article Type: Case Report

Submitted on: 03-Jul-2018, 06:19:16 AM GMT **Published on:** 03-Jul-2018, 06:19:34 AM GMT

Article URL: http://www.webmedcentral.com/article_view/5499

Subject Categories: MEDICAL EDUCATION

Keywords: Activities, Caribbean, disability, movie screening

How to cite the article: Shankar P, James A, Balasubramaniam R. Obtaining a clearer perspective on the differently abled: a case study from a Caribbean medical school. WebmedCentral MEDICAL EDUCATION 2018;9(7):WMC005499

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Source(s) of Funding:

There were no sources of funding for this work

Competing Interests:

The authors do not have any competing interests to declare.Â

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Author(s): Shankar P, James A, Balasubramaniam R

Abstract

Movies are used in medical schools for a variety of purposes ranging from learning of professionalism, public health, drug dependence, disability among others. In a medical school in Aruba, Dutch Caribbean movies and activities were used to strengthen learning of communication skills, empathy, professionalism, and death and dying. American International Medical University in Saint Lucia admits students for graduate courses in medicine and nursing. Recently innovations have been carried out to the basic sciences curriculum. A movie screening and activity was used at the institution to provide a clearer perspective about the differently abled. The movie "My left foot" was screened followed by group activities and presentations. Participant feedback was obtained using a simple questionnaire and noting the degree of respondents' agreement with a set of eight statements. The mean score was 33.9 (maximum score 40). Student feedback about the session was positive. Similar sessions can be considered in future and could be expanded to involve all basic science students.

Introduction

Medical schools around the world are incorporating learning of the humanities into the undergraduate medical curricula using various modalities like theater, literature, philosophy, theater and the arts.¹ Movies have been used for a variety of purposes in undergraduate medical education. In a medical school in Brazil, scenes from movies were used to teach about substance use disorders.² Thirty-nine scenes from 27 Brazilian movies were used. In a medical school in New Zealand movies were used to support learning of public health.³ Student attitudes toward this intervention was positive. In Slovenia, movies were used to teach professionalism to fourth year medical students.⁴ The authors concluded that the controlled environment of the movies provided opportunities for students to explore their values, beliefs and attitudes toward different aspects of professionalism.

Movie screening and activities in OCMS

Movie screening and activities have been used in an offshore Caribbean medical school (OCMS) in Aruba to strengthen the learning of communication skills, empathy, professionalism and provide a greater understanding of death and dying.⁵ OCMS usually admit three intakes of students in January, May and September. American International Medical University (AIMU) is an OCMS located in Saint Lucia admitting students mainly from India, Nigeria and other countries to the undergraduate medical (MD) program. The school follows a traditional discipline-based basic sciences curriculum. Recently, however a number of modifications have been carried out including introduction of a health humanities module, conducting sessions on critical appraisal of scientific literature, use of online modules and organ system-based sequencing of the fourth semester.⁶

Educating medical students about disability

A variety of approaches have been used to educate medical and health students about disability. A selected group of medical students participated in sea voyages of about 5 to 7 days with sailors with disabilities ranging from cerebral palsy, loss of sight, loss of limbs and paraplegia.⁷ Several training programs in the United States either use disabled standardized patients or patients who are normal but portray patients with disabilities.⁸ The authors of an article published in 2011 describe the advantages, challenges and the practical issues involved in running such programs. A systematic analysis of the use of movies in medical education published in 2012 listed 76 articles.⁹ The majority of the studies were from the United States and a variety of issues were explored using movies. Most interventions used clips from movies rather than complete feature length movies. Movie screening and activities have not been previously conducted at AIMU. The present study was

conducted to obtain participant feedback about the activity.

Movie screening and activity at the institution

On 21st June 2018, a movie screening and activity was conducted for fourth semester basic science medical students at AIMU. The objectives of the session were to introduce students to the challenges of the "differently abled"TM, and examine how being differently abled impacts on the person personally and in his/her relationship with their family, community and society. The session also facilitated exploration of the impact of poverty and socioeconomic deprivation on the situation of the differently abled and changes in conditions for them during the last five decades.

Movie My left foot

The 1989 movie "My left foot" the story of Christy BrownTM was screened. The movie narrates the story of the Irish writer and painter, Christy Brown who was born with cerebral palsy and could control only his left foot. He was born into a poor working class family but eventually becomes an acclaimed painter and writer. The screening was followed by activities. The 18 fourth semester students were divided into four small groups. Each group was provided with a specific activity which they completed with reference to the screened movie and to the online library and the internet when required. Table 1 show the activities used during the session. The groups presented their activities to the larger group and the facilitators provided their inputs as and when required. The first and second authors were the facilitators for the session.

Participant feedback

Participant feedback about the session was obtained. No personal identifiable information was collected. RespondentsTM agreement with a set of eight statements was measured using a Likert type scale. Some statements were negatively worded to avoid response bias. Table 2 shows the questionnaire used to obtain student feedback.

As this was a feedback of a pilot educational intervention and no personal data was collected ethical exemption was provided by the institutional review board of AIMU. Sixteen of the 18 students

(88.9%) participated in the session. Fourteen of the 16 participants (87.5%) completed the questionnaire. The mean \pm SD score was 33.9 \pm 2.2 (maximum possible score being 40). Table 3 shows the scores of individual statements. Many students wanted a screening of the movie "Do no harm"TM about suicide among doctors during a later session.

The scores of most statements were high and student opinion about the session was positive. Finding time for this session in a crowded curriculum remains a challenge. This may account for the lower score for statement 8 about similar sessions in the future. AIMU like many OCMS teaches the basic sciences over four semesters of 15 weeks each with the fifth semester concentrating on Introduction to clinical medicine and preparing for standardized exams.

Conclusion:

The session was conducted using logistics available in the school and no extra resources were required. This was a pilot study to examine the feasibility of conducting this type of session at the school. Class sizes at the institution are small. The pilot session went off smoothly and student feedback was positive. Similar sessions exploring other issues can be considered in future. Sessions can be considered for the entire group of basic science students from the first to the fifth semesters.

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