

LOW ATTENDANCE IN LECTURES AT MEDICAL COLLEGES OF KARACHI – A CROSS SECTIONAL SURVEY

Kamran Hafeez¹, Mohammad Laiq-uz-Zaman Khan², Masood Jawaid³, Saroona Haroon⁴

¹ Assistant Professor Orthopedics, Dow International Medical College, Karachi - Pakistan.

^{2,3} Assistant Professor Surgery, Dow International Medical College, Karachi - Pakistan.

⁴ Senior Instructor, Histopathology, Department of Pathology, Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi - Pakistan.

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Kamran Hafeez

Assistant Professor Orthopedics, Dow International Medical College, Karachi - Pakistan.
E-mail: kamranhafeez@hotmail.com

Date Received:
September 08, 2013

Date Revised:
February 20, 2014

Date Accepted:
March 04, 2014

ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate the attendance of medical students in the lectures and to identify different factors responsible for low attendance.

Methodology: This cross sectional study was conducted at three medical colleges in Karachi, Pakistan during July to September 2012. Medical students of 3rd year and above representing different medical colleges were asked to fill out a questionnaire to assess the different reasons why medical students tend to absent themselves from lectures, their views regarding content and quality of lectures. Students having attendance of 50% or more were included in the study.

Results: A total of 509 student responded to the survey. Two hundred and eighty two students (having >50% attendance in the last semester) were included in the study. Mean age was 21.14 ± 1.9 years. There were 110 (39%) males and 172 (61%) females. The two most common reasons for not attending the lectures were; timing of the lectures not adjusted according to the students schedule ($n=180$; 63.8%) and the students preferred self/group study over lectures ($n=198$; 70.2%). On the other hand majority of the students ($n=173$; 61.3%) were also of the opinion that it is difficult and complex to learn without lectures.

Conclusion: There are various reasons for absenteeism from lectures including timing of the lectures and preference for self study. These need to be rectified in order to strengthen the learning process in medical undergraduates.

Key Words: Lecture, Attendance, reasons for absenteeism.

This article may be cited as: Hafeez K, Khan MLZ, Jawaid M, Haroon S. Low attendance in lectures at medical colleges of Karachi – A cross sectional survey. *J Postgrad Med Inst* 2014; 28(2):161-4.

INTRODUCTION

Low attendance in lectures is not a new problem. It has also been identified previously¹ and number of causative factors has been suggested including illness, transport problems, inconvenient lecture times, poor content of lectures and poor lecturing techniques². Lectures remain one of the important modes of teaching in many medical colleges despite adaptation of new curriculum. It is easy to deliver knowledge through lecture to a large number of students and logistically saving resources. With the revolution in the electronic equipment³ there are varieties of computer based soft wares to assist in making the lectures more presentable, interesting and interactive, thus making the traditional teaching effective⁴. Despite this development low attendance at lectures is still an issue. Absenteeism at higher education level affects the learning process of the students as well

as the final result at the end of academic session^{5,6}.

There has been a raising concern that it affects the professional socialization also. Lecture and tutorials provide a platform where students interact with the teachers, observe them and distinguish them as role models. Low attendance hence may affect this process and hinder their professional growth⁷. On the other hand the role of teachers in improving student's attendance in lectures can not be denied. Good attendance is probably the most important and direct reflection of the student's perception of the effectiveness and usefulness of the lectures delivered. Teachers with good teaching skills deliver lectures which are organized and structured; have good communication skills which attract students and shows higher attendance rates⁸.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the attendance of medical undergraduates studying at various

medical colleges of Karachi in lectures and to assess the causes of absenteeism.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional study was conducted at three medical colleges in Karachi, Pakistan during July to September 2012. Medical students of 3rd year and above (clinical years) were approached representing different medical colleges. Students were briefed about the study and at the end of a lecture, questionnaires were distributed, and time was allocated to fill the desired questionnaire after consent. Online form was also made available through Google and students who were not present at that time were encouraged to fill out the form. Students were assured that they can withdraw at anytime without reprisal. First part of the questionnaire contained general information regarding their demographics and attendance in last semester. Second part consisted of various survey questions assessing the different reasons why medical students tend to absent from lectures, their views regarding content and quality of lectures. Questionnaires filled by the students having attendance less than 50% in last semester were excluded.

The data was analyzed using SPSS (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA). Demographics were presented as

descriptive statistics while Chi-square test was used to compare between groups. P value <0.05 was considered significant.

RESULTS

A total of 509 students filled out the study questionnaire. Based on their attendance 282 (55.4%) students having 50% or more attendance in the last semester; were included in the study while 227 students (44.6%) were excluded. One hundred and thirty students (46%) had attendance in between 50-70%, 85 students (30%) had 71-90% attendance and 67 students (24%) had more than 90% attendance. Mean age was 21.14 ± 1.9 years. There were 110 (39%) males and 172 (61%) females. Most of the students (57%) were living >10km from their corresponding colleges. Few students (24.1%) consider transport facility as a causative factor in non-attending the lectures while majority of the students (52.1%) disagree with this. Majority of the students (58.9%) thought that the content of the lectures is poor. Females were more in number regarding poor content of lecture material (p = 0.018). Most of the students (63.8%) thought that timing of the lectures is not adjusted according to their schedule. A large number of students (63.1%) reported health related issues

Table 1: Reasons why students do not attend lectures

Questions	Agree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Disagree n(%)
You feel that the content of the lecture is poor	166(58.9)	92(32.6)	24(8.5)
You feel that the material in the lectures is being presented in a poor manner	177(62.8)	75(26.6)	30(10.6)
I don't attend lectures as I can download them from the college websites	117(41.5)	82(29.1)	83(29.4)
You believe that lectures are a hindrance in completing other assignment of school (clinical posting, journal making, attending OPD and OT etc)	106(37.6)	96(34.0)	80(28.4)
You are not able to attend lectures because of distance between OPD/Hospital and Medical College	127(45.0)	59(20.9)	96(34)
You feel your health related issues has a huge effect on your attendance	178(63.1)	67(23.8)	37(13.1)
You prefer self / group studying over attending lectures	198(70.2)	47(16.7)	37(13.1)
Do you have trouble in attending lectures due to transportation problem	68(24.1)	66(23.4)	147(52.1)
You feel that the timing of the lectures are not best adjusted in your schedule	180(63.8)	67(23.8)	35(12.4)
You believe that you can pass exams without attending the lectures	133(47.2)	97(34.4)	52(18.4)

Table 2: Reasons why students prefer to attend lectures

Questions	Agree n(%)	Neutral n(%)	Disagree n(%)
Attending lectures is vital to find out what I am supposed to learn	125(44.3)	113(40.1)	44(15.6)
Attending lectures results in good grades	123(43.6)	102(36.2)	57(20.2)
Is it compulsory for you to attend lectures in order to attend exams	137(48.6)	25(8.9)	120(42.6)
It is difficult and complex to learn without guidance and help through lectures	173(61.3)	48(17.0)	61(21.6)
Attending lectures is vital for its easier learning the material than on my own	143(50.7)	83(29.4)	56(19.9)
Parents/Family put pressure on me to attend lectures/tutorials	97(34.4)	121(42.9)	64(22.7)
I enjoyed attending lectures very much	95(33.7)	70(24.8)	117(41.5)

as a cause of absenteeism but there was no difference among the genders. Majority (70.2%) of the students preferred self/group study as compared to lectures (Table 1). On the other hand most students (61.3%) also believe that it is difficult and complex to learn without lectures. Some students (44.3%) also reported that attending lectures is vital to learn what they are supposed to. Some (43.6%) also claimed that attending lectures will help in achieving good grades and in some students view (48.6%) lecture attendance is necessary to attend exams (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

Our study reports considerably low attendance in lectures; only 282 (55.4%) students had 50% or more attendance in the last semester. Two top most reasons why students don't attend lectures were; the timings of the lectures were not adjusted according to their schedule and that they preferred self/group study over lectures. On the other hand majority also considered lectures as a source of learning and guidance.

Lectures are still one of the important modes of teaching in universities. The main purpose of lectures is to present the knowledge in a structured and efficient way. Lectures involved teaching a lot of students in a single large class room and test the ability of a teacher how efficiently he conveys the knowledge and keeps the students attentive. Poor lecture content or presentation skills make the students lose their concentration and this affects the attendance of the students in class rooms. In addition to this there are number of other factors which affect the student attendance. With

the increasing advancement in technology, access to knowledge is not a big deal. Students nowadays are well equipped with electronic gadgets like laptops; smart phones etc and they can have electronic study material in their hand at all times, they can download lectures from university websites as well as they can have access to recorded lectures. But still the role of a teacher can not be denied who help them in integrating new information with previously learned material and to apply it in solving problems.

Low attendance in lectures is always a problem. We need to identify the problems why students don't want to attend lectures. Information present in lectures should be moulded as per requirements of students and present them in a new way which is more acceptable and increases the presence of students.

Billings-Gagliardi et al⁹ studied the student decisions regarding lecture attendance and they reported that presence of electronic learning materials will not affect the lecture attendance if the students think that the lecture content will contribute in their learning. In our study 58.9% students thought that the content of the lectures was poor, 62.8% reported that the lecture content were presented in a poor manner and 41.5 % didn't want to attend lectures as they can download the lectures from website. Some of the students agreed (44.3%) that attending lectures is vital to know what they are supposed to learn. It appears that if we improve the quality of the lectures and presents them in a more interactive way; it will have a positive impact on the attendance of lectures.

Westrick et al¹¹ studied reasons to attend and not at-

tend the lecture courses for pharmacy students and the two most common reasons to attend lectures were; they wanted to take their own notes and lecturers highlighted important points in their lectures which they need to remember. On the other hand the two most common reasons for not attending the lectures were; studying for another course and easy availability of the course material. In our study the two most common reasons for not attending the lectures were the timings of the lectures not adjusted according to their schedule and students preferred self/group study over lectures.

Bati et al¹² assessed 663 students from medical, dental, pharmacy and nursing to evaluate the reasons for lecture attendance. He reported individual causes for not attending the lectures including sleeplessness, ill health and inefficient lectures. While the reasons to attend lectures were; opportunity to ask questions, making their own lecture notes and learning the emphasized points during lectures. In our study a large number of students (63.1%) reported health related issues as a cause of absenteeism.

Khan et al⁶ compared the results of end of term tests among students of two subgroups. Students having low attendance had a more failures in exams. In our study some of the students (47.2%) were of the opinion that they can pass exam without attending the lectures while others (43.6%) believed that attending lectures results in good grades.

Dhaliwal U¹³ reported association of higher attendance with better marks. There were number of causes as a cause of absenteeism including illness, family commitments, lecture topic and lecture time spent in clinical posting. Our study also showed other causes for low attendance.

There are certain limitations to this study including its nature (i.e., cross sectional), limited number of medical colleges where the study was conducted, a non-validated questionnaire and the response bias as it was a questionnaire based study. However the results of this study highlight an important issue which should be treated as a matter of importance. There is need to focus on the contents of the lectures and the lectures should be interactive so as to keep the students involved.

CONCLUSION

Attendance was low in our lectures and there were various reasons for absenteeism from lectures including timing of the lectures and preference for self study. This raises concerns for the educators to rectify these factors in order to improve student's attendance in lectures. This will definitely have a positive effect in the professional growth of these medical undergraduates.

REFERENCES

1. Synder BR. The hidden curriculum. New York: Knopf; 1971.
2. Kottasz R. Reasons for student non-attendance at lectures and tutorials: an analysis. *Invest Uni Teach Learn* 2005;2:5-21.
3. Chodorow S. Educators must take electronic revolution seriously. *Acad Med* 1996;71:221-6.
4. Waugh RA, Mayer JW, Ewy GA, Felner JM, Issenberg BS, Gessner IH, et al. Multimedia computer assisted technology. *Arch Intern Med* 1995;155:197-203.
5. Friedman P, Rodriguez F, McComb J. Why students do and do not attend classes: myths and realities. *Coll Teach* 2001;49:124-33.
6. Khan HU, Khattak AM, Mahsud IU, Munir A, Ali S, Khan MH, et al. Impact of class attendance upon examination results of students in basic medical sciences. *J Ayub Med Coll Abbottabad* 2003;15:56-8.
7. Hammer DP, Berger BA, Beardsley RS, Easton MR. Student professionalism. *Am J Pharm Educ* 2003;67:1-29.
8. Massingham P, Herrington T. Does attendance matter? An examination of students' attitudes, participation, performance and attendance? *J Uni Teach Learn Pract* 2006;3:83-103.
9. Billings-Gagliardi S, Mazor KM. Student decisions about lecture attendance: do electronic course materials matter? *Acad Med* 2007;82:73-76.
10. Williams C, Aubin S, Harkin P, Cottrell D. A randomized, controlled, single-blind trial of teaching provided by a computer-based multimedia package versus lecture. *Med Educ* 2001;35:847-54.
11. Westrick SC, Helms KL, McDonough SK, Breland ML. Factors influencing pharmacy students attendance decisions in large lectures. *Am J Pharm Educ* 2009;73:83.
12. Bati AH, Mandiracioglu A, Orgun F, Govsa F. Why do students miss lectures? A study of lecture attendance amongst students of health science. *Nurse Educ Today* 2013;33:596-601.
13. Dhaliwal U. Absenteeism and under-achievement in final year medical students. *Natl Med J India* 2003;16:34-7.

CONTRIBUTORS

KH conceived the idea and planned the study. MLZ helped in manuscript writing. MJ helped in data analysis and interpretation. SH helped in designing of study and manuscript writing. All authors contributed significantly to the final manuscript.