

Evaluation on Empathy Skills among Undergraduate Pharmacy Students in a Malaysian University

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Abstract: Empathy skills are not widely practiced within the healthcare settings. This study helps to create awareness among the undergraduate pharmacy students about the importance of practicing empathy skills. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the level of empathy skills among undergraduate pharmacy students in a Malaysian University in Selangor. A cross-sectional study was conducted and the students were chosen using blanket sampling method. A survey questionnaire was used as method of instrument and distributed to Year 1 until Year 4 undergraduate pharmacy students. Descriptive analysis was used to evaluate student's empathy skills towards patient-centered care by using Jefferson Scale of Empathy-Health Profession Student Version (JSE-HPS). Other than that, One-way ANOVA test was used to compare empathy skills across different year of study and Pearson's Correlation test was used to find correlation between student's socio-demographic profiles such as age and year of study with empathy skills. Upon analysis, students aged between 26 to 30 years old and female students scored higher level of empathy skills compared to younger students and male students. Apart from that, mean percentages across different years of study were not dependent with empathy skills towards patient-centered care as P-value showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$). Besides, emotional dimension of empathy across different years of study also showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) which indicates they were not dependent to each other. Analysis for correlation between socio-demographic profiles such as age and year of study with student's perspective taking, compassionate care and emotional dimension of empathy showed no correlation with each other since there were no significant difference ($p > 0.05$). On the other hand, walking in in patient's shoes factor showed a negatively low correlation with age and year of study. To conclude, empathy skills being applied in undergraduate pharmacy students are beneficial for betterment in future healthcare provider-patient relationship and clinical outcomes.

Keywords: Student's Perspective, Compassionate Care, Walking in Patient's shoes, Emotional Dimension of Empathy.

1. Introduction

Empathy skill trait that is required in oneself to be a pharmacist which can be nurtured and developed among pharmacy students in the classroom [9]. There are two constructs that can describe the empathy skills which include cognitive and emotional domains [8]. Cognitive empathy characterised as the ability of an individual to understand other people's feelings meanwhile, affective empathy described as experienced of emotion in which it is an automatic drive to respond to another individual's emotions [1]. Existing researches have shown that these domains might contribute to clinical skills. However, several findings have shown that health professional students report decreased empathy throughout their training in a patient-centered care. Thus, this decline in skills raised concerns among healthcare educators that awareness should be applied among students to improve their empathy skills throughout their studies and prevent further decline [2]. Emphatic engagement in healthcare settings was found to increase patient's satisfaction towards a better and more accurate clinical diagnosis as well as treatment outcomes where several studies has been conducted by healthcare professionals. Besides that, it was believed can decrease patient's anxiety and depression among chronic patients such as cancer by engaging empathy skills among nursing students in patient care [5]. A few obstacles were identified such as an absence of role model as an inspiration to the trainees. Other than that, emotional pressures such as too much workload in the work area which contribute into a stressful working environment as well as a negative culture in the hospital itself also could be one of the obstacles in emphatic engagement [7]. Therefore, this problem needs to be practiced and develop during pharmacy school which will enhance the integrity of pharmacist. This skills also can produce a good patient-pharmacist communication thereby, building their trust in deals a basic ting with pharmacists again in the future.