Effectiveness of Communication Studies Program at Tokyo Dental College Based on Comments from Members of Public in Educational Organization

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the Communication Studies Program at Tokyo Dental College as a tool in behavioral education. The number of Patient Community members who had participated in multiple sets of the program for third-year students in the same year within the 3-year period spanning 2016 to 2018 (152, 148, and 129 students in 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively), and the period during which they had participated in multiple sets were investigated. Comments on student behavior, including on hairstyle, clothes, and attitude, were also analyzed. The total number of members who had participated in multiple sets (1 set comprised 1 lecture and 2 training sessions) was 5; and their comments were more favorable during the second (sets 3 and 4) than the first half of the 1-month program (sets 1 and 2). During the first half, the students were criticized for speaking softly, having bad posture, not concentrating, and having an attitude inappropriate for a medical worker; but in the second half, they were praised for beginning to adopt the proper attitude for a medical worker, speaking louder, having better posture, and a very serious attitude. These findings suggest that the Communication Studies Program is effective in improving student behavior.

Key words: Patient community—Student behavior—
Communication Studies Program—Tokyo Dental College

Introduction

The school motto of Tokyo Dental College is “Character-building is the first step in becoming a dentist”. Therefore, comprehensive education focused on communication is provided throughout the 6-year training period required. This comprises a diagonal curriculum aimed at developing an appropriate ethical perspective, humanity, and the spirit of cooperation in each student as they progress toward becoming a healthcare professional. The emphasis is on nurturing communicative and behavioral skills prior to commencement of clinical training at a hospital.

The Communication Studies Program was designed to provide the students with early exposure to a clinical environment. Under this program, first-year students are required to observe clinical practice at one of the 3 hospitals affiliated to the college: Suidobashi Hospital, Ichikawa General Hospital, or Chiba Hospital (renamed the Chiba Dental Center in 2018). While they are doing this they are evaluated by the patients, who are asked to identify their strong points and as well as those that require improvement in terms of appearance, clothing, behavior, and communication. Discussions are then held with the students on how these points may be improved. In their third year, they are required to acquire practical communication skills by rehearsing medical interviews through roleplay. In the fourth year, they are required to develop insights into the specificity of each clinical department based on their experience of medical interviews in the third year. Now they have to conduct medical interviews and undergo training using simulated patients (SPs) invited from external bodies.

Education using SPs is provided in various

fields, including dentistry^{3,5)}, medicine^{1,6)}, and nursing^{2,4)}. This type of training allows educators to train students under unified conditions of patient management, without troubling actual patients as a merit. On the other hand, this may lead to a lack of realism due to inappropriate responses from the SPs⁵⁾. It is necessary to manage various types of patient in a clinical setting, and SP-based education may be insufficient for students to accurately visualize patients who actually use hospital services.

Taking this into consideration, in 2010, Tokyo Dental College established organization called the Patient Community (P-Com). The aim of P-Com is to provide a training resource that more closely resembles that which might be experienced in a clinical setting than that which can be achieved with SPs^{7,8)}. It is made up of citizens who subscribe to the approach to education adopted by Tokyo Dental College, and includes 13 men and 15 women as of 2018. Its members mainly observe programs at the university, and offer comments on them from the perspective of patients. They also participate in the Communication Studies Program. After participating in each lecture and training session provided as part of the program, they describe their impressions. They also give their opinions regarding faculty members in charge, students, and teaching methods, so that faculty members can provide students with feedback based on such information.

The Communication Studies Program for third-year students helps students acquire the wide range of knowledge and skills required to conduct medical interviews appropriate to each clinical department. This is based on the idea that the communication abilities acquired through this program will markedly influence the outcome of the clinical training

they will receive at a hospital and ability to communicate with patients after they graduate.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the Communication Studies Program for third-year students as a tool in behavioral education by analyzing the comments offered by P-Com members. The focus was on whether this improved the students' communication abilities, especially their behavior.

Materials and Methods

The Communication Studies Program for third-year students consists of 4 sets of 1 lecture and 2 training sessions each. The duration is 1 month. To clarify improvements in student behavior during the course of the program, it was necessary to investigate changes in the comments provided by P-Com members participating in multiple sets by means of a questionnaire. Therefore, comments from P-Com members provided within the 3-year period spanning the academic years (April–March) 2016 and 2018 were analyzed. The following items were investigated: 1) the number of P-Com members who had participated in multiple sets of the Communication Studies Program in each year; 2) the years when they had participated in multiple sets; and 3) their comments on student behavior using a student evaluation sheet.

Results

1. Number of members who had participated in multiple sets of the Communication Studies Program in each year

The number of P-Com members who had participated in the Communication Studies Program in 2016 was 6, 3 of whom participated in multiple sets: 1 in all sets; 1 in sets 1, 2, and 4; and 1 in sets 1 and 2.

The number of P-Com members who had participated in the program in 2017 was 8, 3

of whom participated in multiple sets: 1 in all sets; 1 in sets 2 and 4; and 1 in sets 2 and 3.

The number of P-Com members who had participated in the program in 2018 was 8, 5 of whom had participated in multiple sets: 2 in all sets; and 3 in sets 1 and 4.

2. Years when P-Com members had participated in multiple sets

Removing duplicates, the total number of P-Com members who had participated in multiple sets of the Communication Studies Program between 2016 and 2018 was 5, 2 of whom had participated in all sets during this period. The 3 other members had participated in all sets in the following year/years: 2017 and 2018, 2016 and 2018, and 2018 only.

3. Comments on student behavior

The 5 P-Com members who had participated in multiple sets of the Communication Studies Program between 2016 and 2018 were called Members A–E. The years they had participated in multiple sets were as follows: A and B, all years; C, 2017 and 2018; D, 2016 and 2018; and E, 2018. Comments on student behavior were extracted, and those not containing behavior-related descriptions excluded. In the following section, the members' negative and positive comments on student behavior are underlined and double-underlined, respectively:

(1) Member A (male)

2016:

Set 1

>During roleplay, some students were spinning their pens when performing the role of dentist.

>Some students had dyed their hair brown.

Set 2

>Most female students with long hair had tied their hair back.

Set 4

>There was no student chattering during roleplay anymore.

2017:

Set 1

>During medical interviews, some students

were spinning their pens when performing the role of dentist.

>Some students kept their legs crossed when performing the role of dentist.

Set 3

>The number of students spinning their pens when performing the role of dentist markedly decreased.

>Students tended to perform the role of dentist in a shamefaced way during the earlier sets, but they have begun to perform it more confidently.

Set 4

>I felt that all students' behavior is markedly improving.

>One of the students performing the role of dentist was wearing a bracelet.

2018:

Set 2

>Some students were spinning their pens when performing the role of dentist.

Set 3

>In a group of 40 students, 3 were spinning their pens when performing the role of dentist.

(2) Member B (male)

2016:

Set 1

>Some students fell asleep while watching a video.

Set 4

>Students performing the role of dentist spoke appropriately to the patients, looking directly into their eyes.

2017:

Set 4

>Some students ignored the "Rise" command.

>The number of students seriously listening to the lecturer has increased since Set 3.

2018:

Set 4

>All students participated in training in a very serious manner.

(3) Member C (female)

2017:

Set 2

>The voice of students performing the role

of dentist was too low.

>Some of the students performing the role of dentist had long bangs, while others frequently touched their hair or swung their head.

>The way students performing the role of dentist swung their body whenever they moved their chair was annoying.

Set 4:

>Some male and female students with their hair dyed brown drew my attention.

>I also noted that some students were dozing during training.

>But overall, I think many students adopt the appropriate behavior to conduct medical interviews.

2018:

Set 1

>The voice of students performing the role of dentist was too low.

Set 2

>The voice of some students performing the role of dentist was still too low.

>The posture of some students performing the role of dentist was poor, with some even supporting themselves with their elbow on the desk.

>Some students performing the role of dentist were swinging their chair.

>Some students performing the role of dentist frequently touched their hair.

Set 3

>Students performing the role of dentist began to speak louder and more clearly.

Set 4

>The number of students taking notes during training has generally increased.

(4) Member D (male)

2016:

Set 1

>The white coats of students performing the role of dentist were clean, and created a good impression.

2018:

Set 1

>Some students performing the role of dentist looked down while they spoke to the patients.

Set 4

>The posture of students performing the role of dentist has improved.

>Students performing the role of dentist showed sincere attitudes toward the patients.

>Students performing the role of dentist showed appropriate consideration to the patients.

(5) Member E (male)

2018:

Set 4

>Some students with their white-coat sleeves tucked up and women with excessively long bangs drew my attention.

>Students enthusiastically participated in training.

Discussion

Communication Studies is an important program aimed at providing both practical skills and behavioral education. The goal of behavioral education is to help the students develop the appropriate conduct required as a dentist to gain the patient's trust. Quantitative evaluation is difficult in this area, however. Difficulty in evaluating a student's achievements through a program also signifies difficulty in evaluating the effectiveness of that program, and the Communication Studies Program is no exception in this respect. Analyzing comments offered by P-Com members from the perspective of actual patients after participating in this program, it is possible to evaluate not only the students' achievements, but also the program. More favorable comments on student behavior during the second compared with the first half of each year support the effectiveness of the program. If, on the other hand, the comments had shown the opposite tendency, this would have indicated that the program was ineffective. In either case, participation of P-Com members in multiple sets of the program within the same year is indispensable in clarifying changes in student behavior. Patient Community members' participation itself may also

have positively influenced student behavior. The current analysis targeted only those members who had participated in all sets of the program, however. Therefore, we believe that these improvements are more likely to have resulted from the program itself. On the other hand, as a study limitation, student behavior in the absence of P-com members was not assessed and therefore remains to be clarified.

Participation by P-Com members is solely on a voluntary basis. As the lectures and training sessions that make up the program are held during regular school hours (between 9:00 to 17:30), it may have been difficult for working P-Com members to participate in the program several times. In fact, only 5 members had participated in multiple sets of the Communication Studies Program within the 3-year period spanning 2016 to 2018. Therefore, further study employing a much larger sample size of patient comments is needed to verify the effectiveness of the Communication Studies Program. In this respect, a more appropriate time frame for the program (for example, holding sessions on Saturdays, in addition to weekdays) should be considered.

It may also be necessary to examine both short- and long-term change in student behavior. Currently, the Communication Studies Program for third-year students is provided during the same time frame as that earmarked for the lectures, training, and facility observation required under another mandatory course, the Hygiene Program. Therefore, change in student behavior could only be observed over a 1-month period. Further revision of the curriculum is scheduled, and the Communication Studies Program will be provided within the same time frame as that allotted to the Relational Medicine Program from 2019 onward. A longer period of observation is necessary, we believe. Therefore, it may be desirable to coordinate class allocation on consultation with the faculty members of Ichikawa General Hospital in charge of relational medicine.

In conclusion, the present results suggest that the Communication Studies Program at

Tokyo Dental College has helped improve the behavior of the students.

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