Communication skills of year-3 medical students and clinical examination of patients on ward

Larisa Sabath¹, Petra Rižnik¹, Sebastjan Bevc¹,²

¹Centre for Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Maribor, Taborska ulica 8, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia
²Clinic for Internal Medicine, University Medical Centre Maribor, Ljubljanska ulica 5, 2000 Maribor, Slovenia
larisa.sabath@gmail.com petra.riznik@gmail.com sebastjan.bevc@ukc-mb.si

Background: At our faculty, internal medicine curriculum of year-3 medical students (MS) has an obligatory 18-hour propedeutics clinical skills training (CST) in Clinical Skills Laboratory, held by peer-tutors. MS are learning history taking and physical examination on each other. At the end of CST they are evaluated using objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) and start their practice with teachers on ward. The aim of our study was to assess MSs’ ability of effective communication with patients after completing CST.

Methods: We evaluated communication skills of MS (N=30) while performing cardiovascular examination (CVE) on patients, hospitalized at University Medical Centre Maribor. Three aspects of communication (instructions to the patient, explanations to the patient and interaction between patient and MS in general) were observed by peer-tutor. Each aspect was categorized as excellent, very good, good or bad. After completing CVE, MS were asked to assess their overall communication with patient using the above mentioned categories (Figure 1).

Results: MS reached 73.1% of overall points for their communication skills. They were given 75% of points on average for instructions and general interaction with patient and 69.2% of points on average for the explanations that were given to the patient during CVE. MS assessed their communication skills with 71.7% of points on average (Table 1).
Table 1. Results of communication skills assessment of year-3 medical students during cardiovascular examination on ward. Overall assessment of communication skills has three aspects – instructions to the patient, explanations to the patient and interaction between patient and medical student in general.

**Conclusion:** Communication skills of year-3 MS were satisfactory. Nevertheless, in the future peer tutors should put more efforts in training all these aspects of communication. During CST, MS usually do not feel the need to explain all the parts of the physical examination as they train on each other. Regarding MSs’ self-assessment, it was comparable to peer-tutors evaluation of their communication skills.