

Innovative e-learning Methods in Building Competency in Court Room Skills for MBBS Students: An Experience in Medical Learning During Covid-19 Times

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Abstract

Introduction: With the introduction of Competency Based Medical Education (CBME) Curriculum, students have to acquire competency in the listed items and skills, including court room skills (FM 14.22). Medico-legal reports are used at trials whereupon medical officers tender expert witness testimony. During COVID19 lockdown, Phase II MBBS students were trained completely via e-learning. Establishment of Corpus Delicti, Age Report, in trial of Juveniles in conflict with law was selected for imparting testimonial skills and understanding of courts and legal procedures as well as Juvenile Justice Act (JJAct) and Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

Objectives: Training Phase II MBBS students of KMCT Medical College, Kozhikode by e-learning methods in 6 weeks and assessing the competency via Moot Court presentation.

1. To provide a clear understanding of Indian legal system, courts and its procedures.
2. To provide a clear understanding of elements of Corpus Delicti and establishment of Corpus delicti via evidential testimony.

Competencies addressed: FM3.1-3.2, FM 1.3-1.6, FM 14.22(skills)

Methods: Surrogate court room was created by students via zoom platform under guidance to familiarize deposition of evidence in a court of law. E-learning methods were used-Google classroom, Zoom, YouTube, WhatsApp. Creative writing of case by students and online sessions on steps of evidence tendering by faculty were done.

“Moot Court” Role Play by students (in three teams-Juvenile Justice Board Child Welfare Committee, Prosecution, Defence) was guided by faculty and evaluated by RUBRIC.

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Results & discussion:

- During 6 weeks period Phase II CBME students underwent training and acquired competency in Identity, Legal procedures & Court Room skills completely by e-learning methods.
- The SLOs were acquired by most students by single session.

Conclusion: Through only online sessions the students were enabled with the basic understanding of practical aspects of corpus delicti, summons, court room procedures and expert testimony deposition. The student feedbacks were testimonials of their appreciation for active learning and success of innovative e-learning.

KEYWORDS: e- learning, courtroom skills, Forensic Medicine, competency, Corpus Delicti.

Introduction

With the introduction of the Competency Based Medical Education (CBME) Curriculum in 2019, the students are to acquire competency in the different listed items and skills, one of which is court room skills as per FM 14.22. Medico-legal reports are prepared by medical officers primarily for use at trials whereupon they tender expert witness testimony. As a part of training of Forensic Medicine as per the new curriculum Phase II MBBS students were to be given training in the above topics when the colleges all over India were locked down and education was completely e-learning for a period.

Age Report (Identity Reports) concerns establishment of Corpus Delicti especially in trial of Juveniles in conflict with law and this background was selected for imparting testimonial skills and also understanding of courts and legal procedures as well as elements regarding Juvenile Justice Act (JJ Act) and Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

As per the earlier curriculum, before 2019 introduction of the CBME curriculum, there was no specific skills training and student attainment of skills mandated for competency in courtroom skills and establishment of Corpus Delicti. Hence, the topic was taught with discussion in interactive lecture sessions and practical sessions for clarity of the concept. But, with introduction of CBME curriculum, students have to be competent in certain certified skills, in which are included Corpus Delicti, age estimation report and expert evidence deposition by a doctor in a court of law.

Due to COVID 19 lockdown in the entire nation, it was impossible for the faculty to train the students by giving them first hand exposure by visualising the

court room procedures in a court of law. Hence, we decided to create a simulated environment utilising the e-learning platforms available - Google classroom and Zoom to give in-person first-hand experience to the students to overcome the above challenges and attain the required skills and competencies.

There was a need to evaluate the success of the outcome of training the students using this innovative method, to understand if the students have attained clarity in understanding the court room procedures and establishment of elements of Corpus Delicti via only e-learning methods. Hence an evaluation analysis was also conducted to ascertain the efficacy of this teaching-learning method implemented by the faculty.

Objectives

Surrogate exposure to court room procedures to the Indian Medical Graduate in making, to competently deliver the duty of medical expert witness in a court of law.

To understand if students trained only via e learning are provided with clear understanding of Indian legal system, courts and court room procedures of expert evidence deposition, elements of corpus delicti and establishment of corpus delicti in a court of law via evidential testimony.

Competencies addressed: FM3.1-3.2, FM 1.3-1.6, FM 14.22(skills)

Methods Implemented:

Training 150 Phase II MBBS students of KMCT Medical College, Kozhikode in Courts and Legal Procedures by suitable e-learning methods in a period of 6 weeks (24/5/2021 to 05/07/2021) and

assessing the attainment of competency via Moot Court presentation at the end of the period.

Competencies addressed included FM 3.1-3.2, FM 1.3-1.6, FM 14.22(skills)¹

As a preparation for the surrogate court room presentation, the students were given lecture, small group discussions (SGD) and online creative writing workshop on topics of Corpus delicti, summons and court room procedures, from which one of the story lines was picked up for the theme of Moot Court – a Juvenile in conflict with law. The students were provided with several selected video clippings on court room procedures to watch, followed by critical appraisal session in groups under faculty guidance.

E-learning platforms used included- Google classroom, Zoom, WhatsApp, YouTube

Google classroom was utilised for sharing reading materials prepared by faculty. It was also used along with Whatsapp academic group for conveying instructions and guidelines regarding preparation and discussion of the script. Step by step guidance and corrections were also conveyed using these two platforms. YouTube was perused for searching and sharing videos depicting different aspects of court room procedures. It was also useful for understanding and critical analysis of each depicted step since it provided with wide exposure of scenarios in different languages. Evaluation and analysis by students, guidance and correction of concepts by faculty was made easier with the use of Whatsapp academic group and Zoom sessions.

- Preparation Phase :
 - o The students were made competent in biometric identification, age assessment methods and the concept of Corpus Delicti before planning the moot court sessions. For this, they were divided into small groups of 10 members each, who then had competitions on creative writing on Corpus Delicti during which they created crime stories bearing medico- legal significance of age.
 - o One of these story lines was selected for trial in a Juvenile Court setting – of Jamie, a homeless juvenile in conflict with law,

involved in a theft case being tried in JJB and CWC offering care and support at the end of the trial.

- o Short interactive sessions on Indian Legal System-Laws, Courts & Legal Procedures, Juvenile Justice system and relevant AETCOM Components were carried out via Zoom platform for the entire class by faculty members in different sessions.

All classes for preparatory session were taken online live streaming via Google classroom and Zoom. Printed materials prepared by faculty were shared online via Google classroom and Whatsapp academic group for perusal by students.

- **Execution Phase:**

- **Selection of educational material:** 15 Student small groups of (10 members each, total of 150 students) communicated through “Whatsapp” academic group actively collecting multiple short video clippings, of duration 10 to 15 minutes, available online, depicting different angles of court room procedures i.e roll call, swearing in, chief examination, cross examination, re examination, questions by court. These video clippings available in different languages were collected , segregated and selected under continuous guidance of faculty. One video each was selected from these by each small group.
- **Analysis:** Each video depicting one or more components of testimony was critically appraised by the student groups using a predesigned outline supplied as to correctness of different steps in evidence tendering in a court of law namely (a) Oath / swearing in (b) conduct and testimony during chief examination and cross examinations (c) questions by the court and responses to them (d) witness turning hostile (e) elements of perjury (f) AETCOM elements including conduct & dos and don'ts during testimony deposition. The students were given a briefing on dos and don'ts pertaining to each step in evidence deposition i.e., not swearing in for the evidence deposition,

asking leading questions, prompting in chief examination, introduction of new evidence in cross examination without prior presentation of it, accepted manners in maintaining a proper demeanour in a court of law, contempt of court, declaring a witness as hostile, or declaration of perjury. Some of the elements were invariably present in all the video clippings and the students under faculty guidance were able to identify and point out the mistakes in the video clippings streamed by the other team members. Elements like types of witnesses, hostile witness, perjury were also highlighted in certain videos which were clearly analysed. An outline for critical appraisal was given to the students in advance, to be used while viewing/ observing the videos to comment on the videos of other groups at the end. Any team other than the presenting team would, after watching the video is streamed, analyse the streamed video clipping by discussing among them selves and sort out what element is rightly and wrongly represented in the video and give reasons for their final observation and impression. These were approved or corrected by the presenting team, other teams and faculty. Faculty would then give the final impression on each video case session.

This drill helped the students to have a clear idea of each step of evidence deposition in a court of law. Each team was to select a video, which according to them depicted all steps of evidence tendering correctly but with one element that is wrongly featured in the video. The elements that are correctly represented and also the incorrect elements with reasons had to be identified and analysed by the students.

- **Synthesis:** "Moot Court" (Role Play)⁴ was presented on 5th July 2021 by students in sequential groups. The

whole batch of 150 students were divided into three natural sequential groups of 50 each. The students were given a broad outline of the trial sequence and offered guidance in developing it and clearance of doubts online. The students were guided by the faculty and maximum student participation was ensured by the faculty.

The groups were:

- **A.** Court officials, Juvenile Justice Board Members, Child Welfare Committee Members and Judges. A role of Court Master was created for smooth conduct of the T-L session
- **B.** Prosecutors and Prosecution witnesses including common witness (layman), Medical Experts for age and Injury, Fingerprint Expert and Investigating Police Officer
- **C.** Defence Lawyers and their witnesses. Several students enacted the role of JJB Member or Prosecutor or Defence Lawyer – since each witness was chief examined and cross examined by different student role players and JJB member was also different to ensure maximum student participation in online role play of the trial (Moot Court).

- **Evaluation Phase:**

- o The performance was evaluated by faculty by RUBRIC. At the end of the moot court session, the students were assessed using a form for points regarding topics on steps of evidence tendering in the court.

Students' perception of usefulness of the sessions for future performance as Indian Medical Graduate was analysed using a feedback form.

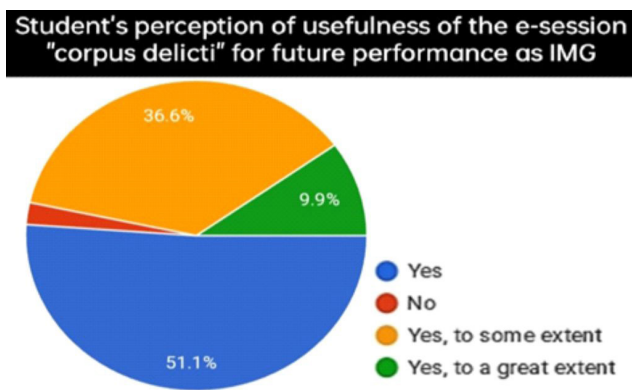


Figure 1

Results and Discussion

The sessions enabled the students with the basic understanding of elements of corpus delicti, practical aspects of summons and court room procedures including conduct rules that an expert witness is expected to follow with dignity³ to maintain good demeanour in a court of law.

- During a period of 6 weeks, extending from 24/5/2021 to 05/07/2021, Phase II CBME students underwent training in Identity, Indian legal system, Legal procedures & Court Room skills with respect to expert witness evidence testimony, completely by e-learning methods to the satisfaction of students and faculty to acquire competency in these topics.
- The set learning objectives were found to be acquired by 80 % of the students by single training exposure. 80% of students had clarity on steps of court room proceedings, apart from which, 60% of students had clear answers on all the types of witnesses also and 20% of students had only partially acquired the clarity on details of steps of expert evidence deposition in a court of law.
- Blooms cognitive levels classifies learning into different levels including knowledge, comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The set learning objectives included all 6 levels of cognitive domains (Bloom)⁵ & were found to be acquired by most of the students by one session as evaluated by role play since it included skills also. Students were found to have understood clearly by performance the facts related to the steps of evidence tendering, applied it in analysing the video clippings and evaluated the steps

depicted in it. They recreated and performed scenario compiling all the steps of evidence tendering by an expert in a flawless manner.

- It was trying for the faculty to continuously monitor all the groups simultaneously and correct them, but the active interest shown by the students even after study hours and enthusiasm for learning and doing the roles appropriately brought energy to the CBME programme implementation. The students were in awe of such experience and after completion of the session they volunteered to upload the video of the online moot court Zoom session in the YouTube⁴ as an appreciation for the innovative active learning techniques implemented by the faculty. This unplanned expressive move of positive feedback from the students was unexpected by the faculty and brought much joy and gave hope to proceed further with more similar sessions with active student involvement.

This innovative method was one of a kind, an early venture and not implemented in Undergraduate training since implementation of CBME curriculum since it was implemented in the very first batch of CBME MBBS students and during complete lockdown and introduction of complete online e-learning sessions in the country, which was first of a kind to happen in India since introduction of CBME curriculum in undergraduate training.

Conclusion

- 2019 MBBS (CBME) batch students of KMCT Medical college, in their Phase II, during a period of 6 weeks, were imparted training in Court Room skills using online platform and critical appraisal as educational tools for understanding court room expert testimony deposition.
- They were evaluated by Rubric during the Court Room Drama enacted by the students.
- Student feedbacks were testimonials for their appreciation for active innovative methods of learning.
- As faculty members, we also found the experience quite satisfying to attain the set SLOs in this regard efficiently.

- **Challenges:**
- Arranging a real court room observation for 150 students was practically unfeasible, especially during COVID 19 lockdown situation, whereas critically appraising simulated scenes proved equally or more effective.
- The project demanded more input and involvement of faculty well beyond the department working hours.
- Planning meticulously made it possible to overcome the possible foreseeable challenges during the execution phase.

Further Plan Scheduled: In stage 2, the phase III part 1 students be made to perform multiple role plays as expert witness in the court room to develop the testimonial skills in different practical sessions wherein the faculty will be playing the role of legal professionals in the court for guidance.

Here we intend to share our experience on the effective coverage of multiple topics with active involvement of the fresh batch of 150 students via hybrid teaching sessions, online- in Phase II (preparatory sessions of 2 hours each every week for 6 weeks using multiple online platforms and presentation and evaluation during the 1 hour online moot court session via zoom platform) and offline - in Phase III part1, to attain the learning outcomes of rendering the Indian Medical Graduate (IMG) capable of preparation of valid medico legal reports, understanding the Indian Legal System, courts and its procedures and giving the expert evidence

testimony in a court of law in addition to attaining the right attitude of positive demeanour in a court and that of the concept of a 'good doctor'.

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Ethical Clearance: NA

Conflicts of Interest statement: NA

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