

An Audit of Climate Change and Sustainability Teaching in Medical School

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Abstract : Climate change is a rapidly growing threat to global health, and part of the responsibility to combat it lies within the healthcare sector itself, including adequate education of future medical professionals. To mitigate the consequences, the General Medical Council (GMC) has equipped medical schools with a list of outcomes regarding sustainability teaching. Students are expected to analyze the impact of the healthcare sector's emissions on climate change. The delivery of the related teaching content is, however, often inadequate and insufficient time is devoted for exploration of the topics. Teaching curricula lack in-depth exploration of the learning objectives. This study aims to assess the extent and characteristics of climate change and sustainability subjects teaching in the curriculum of a chosen UK medical school (Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry). It compares the data to the national average scores from the Climate Change and Sustainability Teaching (C.A.S.T.) in Medical Education Audit to draw conclusions about teaching on a regional level. This is a single-center audit of the timetabled sessions of teaching in the medical course. The study looked at the academic year 2020/2021 which included a review of all non-elective, core curriculum teaching materials including tutorials, lectures, written resources, and assignments in all five years of the undergraduate and graduate degrees, focusing only on mandatory teaching attended by all students (excluding elective modules). The topics covered were crosschecked with GMC Outcomes for graduates: "Educating for Sustainable Healthcare - Priority Learning Outcomes" as gold standard to look for coverage of the outcomes and gaps in teaching. Quantitative data was collected in form of time allocated for teaching as proxy of time spent per individual outcomes. The data was collected independently by two students (KW and ZP) who have received prior training and assessed two separate data sets to increase interrater reliability. In terms of coverage of learning outcomes, 12 out of 13 were taught (with the national average being 9.7). The school ranked sixth in the UK for time spent per topic and second in terms of overall coverage, meaning the school has a broad range of topics taught with some being explored in more detail than others. For the first outcome 4 out of 4 objectives covered (average 3.5) with 47 minutes spent per outcome (average 84 min), for the second objective 5 out of 5 covered (average 3.5) with 46 minutes spent (average 20), for the third 3 out of 4 (average 2.5) with 10 mins spent (average 19 min). A disproportionately large amount of time is spent delivering teaching regarding air pollution (respiratory illnesses), which resulted in the topic of sustainability in other specialties being excluded from teaching (musculoskeletal, ophthalmology, pediatrics, renal). Conclusions: Currently, there is no coherent strategy on national teaching of climate change topics and as a result an unstandardized amount of time spent on teaching and coverage of objectives can be observed.

Keywords : audit, climate change, sustainability, education

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