

Learning in the community

Medical student's experiences of training within a community paediatric clinic set in a low-income neighbourhood

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate medical training in Ireland comprises of clinical training largely within teaching hospitals, with less emphasis on training in community settings. Medical students from University College Cork are offered a unique opportunity to participate in a multi-disciplinary community paediatric clinic located in a low-income neighbourhood.

Through a mixed methods case study design, student's perspectives were captured via questionnaires and reflective diaries. Descriptive statistics were generated, and qualitative data was thematically analysed.

Findings show community-based training influences undergraduate medical education through experiential and transformative learning and provides a unique opportunity for students to gain valuable experience leading consultations. Our study provides an example of how medical education can be effectively embedded into a community, providing a service of value for the people of that community and for students.

BACKGROUND

Undergraduate medical education in Ireland comprises largely of clinical training within teaching hospitals, with little emphasis on community training [1]. Medical institutions have a responsibility to train a workforce equipped to meet the needs of communities they serve [2]. Studies highlight the need to include clinical experiences which move beyond traditional disease models and expand into the community particularly in the domain of child health [3]. Clinical experience in community child health, a fundamental element of paediatric practice, cannot be provided in teaching hospitals [3].

The Kidscope community paediatric clinic was established for children aged 0-6 years living in a disadvantaged area of Cork. Kidscope plays a pivotal role in providing assessment and onward referral for vulnerable children in a timely manner. Kidscope offers clinical experience to undergraduate medical students. Consultations are student-led and supported by a consultant paediatrician. Students gain experience in a range of activities from medical and developmental observations to eliciting family histories and developing healthcare and family support plans.

We aimed to capture the experiences of medical students and to understand the perceived impact of a community training on undergraduate medical education.

RESULTS

52 medical students consented to participate. 32 (62%) responded to the online questionnaire. 20 reflective essays were randomly selected for inclusion.

Questionnaire findings: 94% of students felt the clinic provided an opportunity to apply knowledge and skills, 96% reported the experience strongly improved their understanding of child health and development, and 90% reported the experience was extremely valuable to their overall learning.

Reflective essays: Thematic analysis identified 3 main themes: knowledge acquisition, informing professional practice, and increased knowledge of paediatric models of care.

Quantitative findings show an increase in student's knowledge of child development. Qualitative findings show one-to-one engagement with children and families impacted student's professional practice, heightened their awareness of social deprivation and its impact on child development, and broadened their understanding of effective models of community paediatrics.

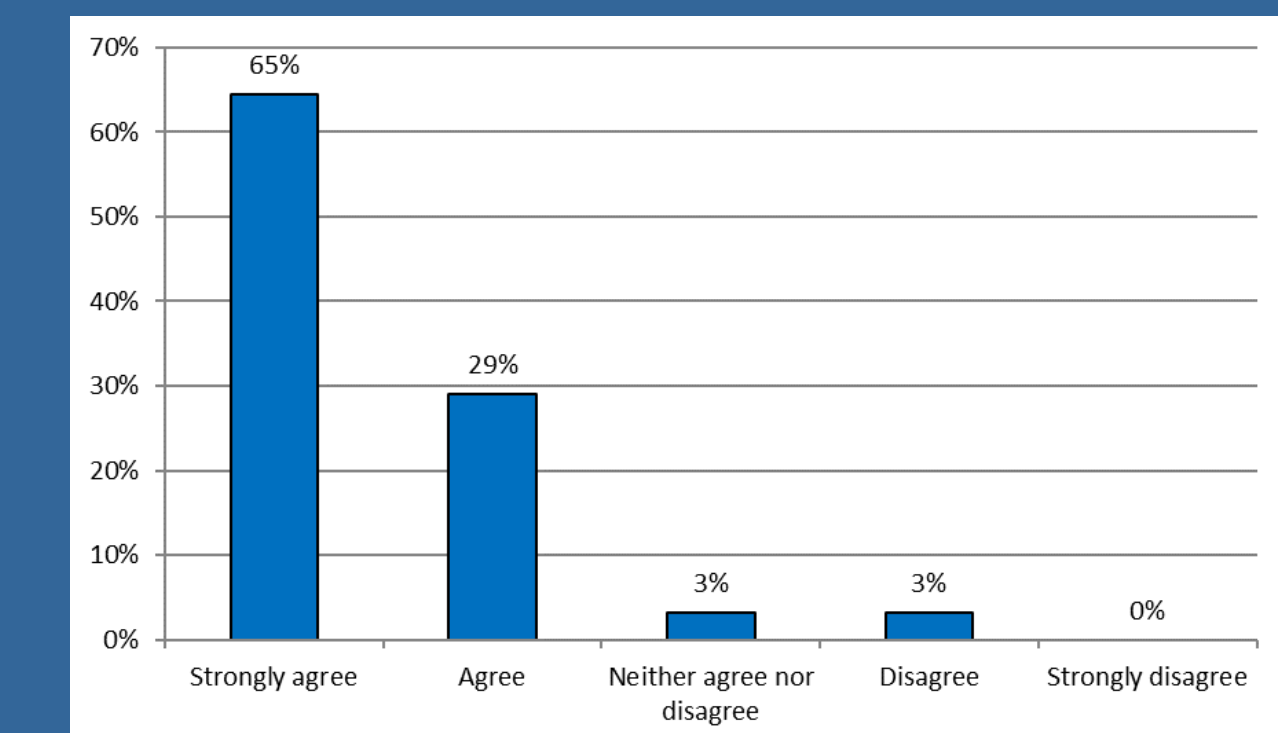
"The clinic allowed me to consolidate what I had learned through study, in a practical community setting"

"Kidscope provided me with a much greater understanding of how to engage with children and families"

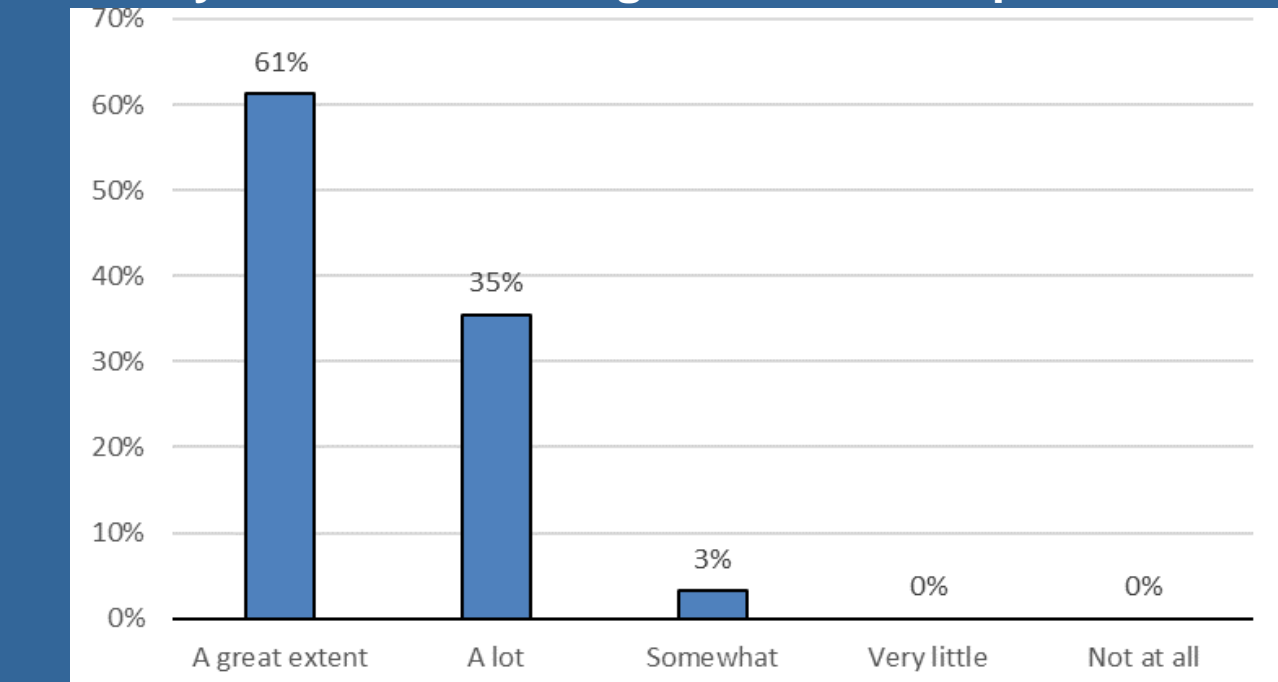
"It was my first experience of a leading the interaction with the patient"

"The environment definitely aided the assessment of children, in a homely, less clinical setting"

Do you believe Kidscope provided an opportunity to apply clinical skills and knowledge?



To what extent did training in Kidscope improve your understanding of child development?



METHODS AND MATERIALS

Study design: Mixed methods case study

Reporting guidelines: Mixed Methods Research Design Standards.

Research questions:

1. How has Kidscope influenced undergraduate training?
2. How has training within Kidscope informed student's perspectives of working with vulnerable children and families?
3. What are medical student's perspectives of Kidscope and its model of care?

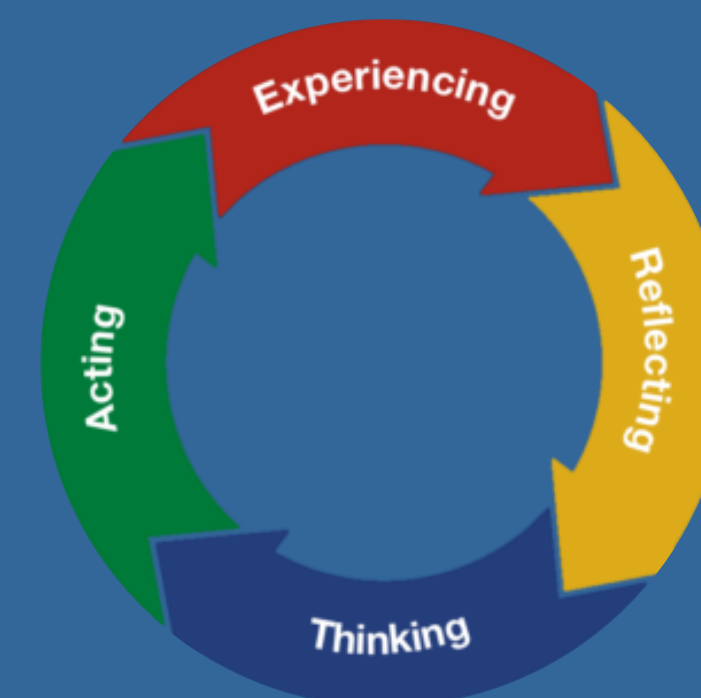
Data collection:

- Mixed-methods questionnaire via Survey Monkey
- Qualitative reflective essays

Data analysis:

- MS Excel used to collate questionnaire responses
- Descriptive statistics generated for close-ended questions
- NVivo used to collate qualitative data for thematic analysis
- Braun & Clarke's framework guided thematic analysis [5,6]

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE



Experiential & transformative learning



Student-led consultations



Embedding universities into communities



Replicating community clinics across medical fields

CONCLUSION

Training within Kidscope enabled students to be engaged learners in a novel community paediatric setting. Exposure to vulnerable children and families enhanced clinical learning, practical skills, and increased knowledge of child development and alternative models of paediatric healthcare. Kidscope provides an example of how medical education can be effectively embedded into a community. Our experience of teaching clinical skills in the community could be replicated across medical fields to the benefit of the wider community.

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