

## LETTER TO EDITOR

# Diagnostic Errors in Undergraduate Students: A threat to Clinical Practice

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To,  
The editor,

There has been an alarming increase in the prevalence of medical errors which include misdiagnoses, surgical mistakes and skill deficiencies in undergraduate students.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate goal of undergraduate teaching is to improve patient safety by reducing the likelihood of diagnostic errors in medicine. There are many reasons that underpin this situation.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, cognitive deficiencies in achieving accurate and plausible diagnosis pulls the student back from thinking critically. Secondly, inadequacy in communicating with patients, attendants and other health care professionals plays a key role towards development of diagnostic errors. Effective communication is an essential part of building and maintaining good physician-patient and physician-colleague relationships.<sup>3</sup> These skills help people to understand and learn from each other, develop alternate perspectives, and meet each other's needs. Lack of clinical reasoning skills and inefficiency in thinking scientifically are other factors that contribute to these errors. Besides these causes, there are errors in the healthcare system which contribute to this dilemma. Technical errors include unavailability of latest equipment or carelessness of laboratory staff resulting in dissemination of incorrect test results.<sup>4</sup> Hence several strategies can be adopted to address these issues and improve the current situation in medical colleges.<sup>5</sup> Good training and ongoing professional development programs can develop clinical expertise in medical undergraduates. Communication skills can be learnt through structured small group learning in

tutorials and clinical settings to overcome emotional and stress barriers. Cognitive deficiencies can be catered by introducing simulation based medical education right from the beginning of medical curriculum. Simulation may be used extensively ranging from basic practical skills learning in a skills lab to complex communication skills teaching using simulated patients. Lastly, constructive feedback may be provided to the undergraduates since it is the most essential component of student learning. It fosters student's growth, provides direction and helps to boost confidence, increase motivation and self-esteem. These approaches would hopefully make the current situation a little better if not improving it completely.

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