



The Teaching of Medical English in the School of Medicine

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This paper will focus on the teaching of English to medical students in the School of Medicine, through the undergraduate and graduate years. It will look at the medical curriculum during those years and the courses on offer to students.

M1: First Year Medical Students

Medical students in their first year in the School of Medicine are subjected to a wide variety of subjects. Most students during this time are carrying a workload of approximately 20 classes per week. All students are required to take the following: one PE course; one medical course which is divided into various components; two language courses ; three mandatory English courses of reading, writing, and listening and speaking classes in general English; eight other electives; and two electives which must be taken in either their first or

second year at the university. Courses for the above subjects are in various locations throughout the university, all English courses offered are taught in the Foreign Language Center.

In the Foreign language Center, all first year students regardless of their major are enrolled in general English courses bases upon the results from a proficiency test. As a result, students are grouped according to their ability and placed in either A, B, or C levels in the three courses of writing, reading, and listening and speaking. The scheduling of the courses for first year medical students (and for all medical students) is made to correspond with the medical curriculum for their respective year and does not take into consideration the scheduling of any other year of medical study.

Students taking general English

courses in reading, writing, and listening and speaking spend their year doing English which is not specific to their field of study. They do not learn necessary medical vocabulary, abbreviations, anatomical systems nor the workings of the human body.

However, last year and again this year, two classes and one class, respectively, each meeting once a week for 75 minutes, took a medical English course in place of the general English course which was scheduled. The course of medical English was tailored to meet the needs of medical students. Using the text, *Building a Medical Vocabulary*, (Chapters 1-7), students through pairwork listen and speak medical English throughout the entire class time. Various medical terminology, abbreviations and fields of medicine are studied. The digestive, respiratory, circulatory and lymphatic systems are described and students are able to recognize and understand the importance of these body systems. As well, two videos from the *Body Atlas Series*, i.e. the brain and the workings of the eyes, give students an in-depth perspective of various aspects on the workings of the human body. Other

videos which put the medical system into focus are: *And the Band Played On*, which discusses the AIDS epidemic in the USA; *Proton Beam Therapy*, allows students to consider a different career in medicine; and *The Cure*, shows death from the viewpoint of a child. Students write a one page report on each of the above videos based on their research and/or what they have learnt from watching the video.

M2: Second Year Medical Students

During their second year in the School of Medicine all medical students are required to take the following subjects: medicine (which covers various fields in the study of medicine e.g. anatomy); a course in PE; a foreign language; as well as one elective. In the course for foreign language, students can choose from several different languages, for example French, German, English, Spanish etc. If the student chooses English, then the course of study is of a general nature, as the subject matter is not geared towards that of the medical field. However, under the elective course, if a student chooses English, then the course is tailored to meet the needs of the medical student.

Using the second half of the text, *Building a Medical Vocabulary*, (Chapters 8-13), second year medical students continue their study of medicine in the same format as they did in their first year of study. There is continued reinforcement of medical terminology, abbreviations as well the reproductive, integumentary, genitourinary, endocrine, central nervous, and muscular and skeletal systems are studied. Further use of the *Body Atlas* series showing, glands and hormones, taste and smell, the skin and the development of a fetus in the womb, are viewed by students. Two feature length videos are used to have students ask and answer some very fundamental questions about themselves as doctors in the future. *The Doctor*, shows clearly what the attributes are of a "good" doctor; and *Whose life is it anyways?* questions the role of the doctor when it comes to "quality of life vs quantity of life". Students write a two page or longer report on the above videos based upon their research or firsthand knowledge of the subject matter.

M3: Third Year Medical Students

Third year medical students start to

settle down to the "nuts and bolts of medical study. During this year, medical students take one medical course which encompasses various aspects in the field of medicine, as well they must take two electives. Medical English in the third year of study is one elective open to students and it is aimed to meet their needs in communicating in English in a medical environment. By using the text *English in Medicine: A Course in Communication*, students learn how to greet, instruct, explain and make a diagnosis of a patient's condition.

As well, the future doctor learns the basics of answering a patient's questions using non-medical terminology, saying balance for vertigo, water for urine, heart attack for cardiac arrest etc. Moreover, students learn to read and write medical charts along with the medical terminology and abbreviations associated with them, for instance, BP, HS, IV, IM, 2/52, tid., ++, etc. In addition students learn how to perform some very basic routine medical test like the knee jerk, plantar reflex, Isaacs-Walkey Mental Impairment Measurement, and take a patient's pulse. Along with learning necessary medical communication, stu-

dents are asked to consider their own knowledge of medicine in Japan, as well as ask themselves what medicine means to them. This is accomplished by having students watch the following videos: *First Do no Harm*, discusses the Ketogenic diet which is considered a form of Alternative Medicine; *Roe vs. Wade*, confronts the students with the ground setting law in the USA which allows women to have an abortion; *BBC Documentary: The Ulcer War*, discusses how research discoveries have to compete with giant pharmaceutical companies to cure patients; and *Outbreak*, a hypothetical situation where a deadly virus like ebola sets emergency plans into action to stop it. Students write a two to three page report on the above videos relating the events to Japan and the situation as it exists today. As well students are expected to do research on the above topics, to cite sources in their essay, and to have a reference page.


M4: Fourth Year Medical Students

Again in the fourth year, medical students concentrate on the medical aspects of their training. A medical course which encompasses clinical lectures and

practices is taken, along with students' choice of two electives. One of these electives is the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE), which is team taught by three medical doctors and one medical English instructor. The three doctors teach students various medical aspects of this exam, whereas the English instructor concentrates on the components of the Clinical Skills Assessment (CSA). The aim of the CSA, is centred on interviewing techniques which students need to know for placement in an overseas hospital. Students learn the relevant techniques to carry out an on examination (O/E) interview with foreign patients through mock doctor/patient scenerios, i.e. questioning techniques, analyzing, diagnosing and writing of charts are paramount. Each scenerio is timed for 15 minutes, at the end of which students are expected to write up their findings using medical abbreviations and terminology on an O/E chart along with a list of three or four possible diagnoses.

M5, M6: Fifth and Six Year Medical Students

For fifth year medical students, a



clinical medical course of Bedside Learning (BSL) is what students spend their year studying. Sixth year medical students spend their last year doing a medical practicum in either a city or rural hospital for the first semester, and the latter half of the year listening to lectures on medical science and practices. In both fifth year and sixth year there are no English courses offered mainly due to the fact that students do not have time available to take an English course, nor are there available time slots on their schedule, since most students begin their day at 8:00 am and end well after 7:00 pm.

Master Course

For the first time this year, an English writing course is being offered to Master Course students, i.e. students who have completed four years of a non-medical doctor course, for instance, those in pharmacology, biological sciences, agriculture etc. The course concentrates on writing techniques used in the social sciences and gives students practice in writing: title pages, abstracts and key words, introduction, methods, results, comment/discussion, references etc. Stu-

dents are given several handouts, one of which is a guideline to reduce bias in language. As no one text covers the techniques necessary for such a broad selection of students, various texts and handouts, as well as Internet sites are utilized.

Conclusion

In order to meet the growing demands from students and medical faculty alike, medical English courses in the undergraduate years needs to be addressed. First year medical students do not need a general course of English study, since they have already spend six years at high school studying such language. These students need an English which meets their needs as doctors in a medical setting rather than wasting a year on general English. Second year students who choose to take the English offered under the foreign language course, also need to have a medical English course which is tailored to their discipline. Fifth and sixth year students need a medical English course which addresses the need for medical writing techniques, since after graduating, these new doctors are expected to publish

medical articles and manuscripts.

Another area that needs to be reconsidered, is that of scheduling. The medical curriculum needs to be looked at as a whole, that is, all six years of medical study need to be coordinated so that none of the medical English courses on offer to any one year are given in the same time slot as another year. If courses of English for medical study are offered on different days in different time slots, then the one instructor in the School of Medicine may

be able to accommodate all students who want and need to study medical English. This may require some creative thinking when it comes to scheduling, it also may be impossible to do with only one instructor. However, if the School of Medicine wants its students to be proficient in medical English, then these issues need to be addressed.

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