

## **Enhancing Social Accountability Skills in Medical Students Through Community School Projects**

By Dr. Mary Mathew, MD, DCH, PGDMLE, FIIOPM, Professor, Department of Pathology, Kasturba Medical College, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal -576104, Karnataka, India

### **Introduction**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), social accountability is “the obligation to direct their education, research, and service activities toward addressing the priority health concerns of the community, the region, or nation they have a mandate to serve. The priority health concerns are to be identified jointly by governments, health care organizations, health professionals, and the public”<sup>1</sup> In the majority of the medical schools in India, social accountability mechanisms are yet to be implemented. It is imperative that medical students have sustained contact with the community through health-related programs to enhance social accountability skills.

### **Gaps in Medical Education in India**

As part of the professional ethos, students are required to be responsible and accountable to societal needs. In the medical curriculum, students interact with the community during their second and third year of medical school through designated primary health centers. However, the duration of the contact is not sufficient to comprehend the community health needs and the challenges that the society faces in accessing care. Hence, alternative training methods should be sought to enhance social responsibility and social accountability in medical students.

### **Role of Student wing of the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics**

The student wing of the International Network of the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics (Haifa) was set up to encourage students to address ethical dilemmas confronting health care workers, patients, and the community through debates, talks, workshops, and community-related projects. An additional objective of this unit was to engage in community projects so as to enhance social accountability and social responsibility.

### **Social Accountability Innovation through Community School Projects**

“Helping Hands, Helping Hands” is a community school project which was initiated by the unit to encourage medical students to actively engage with school children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Below we present an example of an event undertaken by the student wing of the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics (Haifa), Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, Karnataka, India.

### **An Evening at Bharatiya Vikas Trust Residential School**

Members of the student wing organized a program at a residential school in Manipal, Karnataka during after school hours. This residential school is supported by Bharatiya Vikas Trust which is founded on the principle of

bringing socioeconomic change in rural India through education and training. The school provides food, shelter, and education to children from the lower economic strata and empowers them through vocational training and education.

Necessary permissions to visit the school was sought from the dean of the medical school and the trustees of the residential school. The medical students visited the school after work and presented a short skit to teach the children right and wrong. Afterwards, the children were provided an opportunity to participate and ask questions. This mode of teaching where entertainment is fused with learning is called “edutainment” and has been used as a method for developing various competencies in students.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the skit, verbal feedback was taken from the children during which time they expressed happiness and appreciation to the doctors that had come to interact with them in spite of their busy schedules.



*Children at the Bharatia Vikas Trust Residential School*

## **Impacts of Community-related Projects on Medical Students**

Studies have shown that this technique provides experiential learning and improves students' empathetic skills and communication.<sup>3</sup> The co-chair of the student wing said:

*“This experience has taught me the importance of inculcating education as part of a child’s development and the vital role of mass awareness campaigns. It was a pleasure to see the inquisitiveness of a child’s mind and how correct direction during the right time can help them develop positive thoughts for the future. Through this exercise I learned leadership, delegation of work, building rapport, and teamwork.”*

## **Conclusions and Recommendation**

Interaction with the community through various activities can aid in honing the social accountability skills of medical students. Innovative projects involving the community should be encouraged during medical school training to develop competencies in social accountability and social responsibility.

## **Works cited**

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## **Author bio**

**Dr. Mary Mathew** is a Professor of Pathology and Coordinator of Fetal and Perinatal Pathology at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, MAHE, Karnataka, India. She is a postgraduate and undergraduate teacher for the past 23 years and has numerous national and international publications to her credit.

Mathew is the Head of the Indian Program and member of the Education Department of the International network of the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics (Haifa). She is a FAIMER fellow, M-FIILPE (Interprofessional Education), and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. from Maastricht University, The Netherlands.