

Competency-based education for health professionals; demystifying the challenge

THE CONCEPT: “WHAT IS IT?”

Competency-based education (CBE) is an approach that essentially involves compulsory acquisition of a set of predefined skills and knowledge called competencies, by the students to be promoted to the higher grade or class. It lays more emphasis on making the students competent or proficient enough for satisfactory practice of their profession. The definition of the term competency has evolved over the decades, and in the context of health education, it has been defined as “An observable activity of health professional with a judicious and consistent mix of knowledge, skills, attitudes and communication.” CBE differs from traditional approach in not only the way we teach but also in the way we conduct assessments. Since CBE is an outcome-based approach, a major drift in our assessment process is required to ensure its thorough implementation.

THE SCENARIO: “WHERE ARE WE NOW?”

The traditional curriculum for health professional education has the following fallacies which need to be addressed to shift to the CBE

1. The education goals are more of teacher centric
2. The curriculum is process based and as such outcomes are less well defined
3. The teachers lack specific training in CBE
4. The curriculum focuses more on summative assessments, and therefore, formative assessments are not utilized appropriately
5. There is no mechanism to ensure that the student has unequivocally acquired the said competency.

THE GOAL: “WHERE WE NEED TO GO?”

We need to establish a robust system at various levels to sustain the curricular implementation. The various facets of

CBE should be clearly spelled out, and all the stakeholders including students, teachers, institutions, universities, and apex bodies should be well aware of their specific roles in this new framework. There should be a continuously on-going program evaluation scheme to identify the challenges and look for practical solutions.

THE ACTION PLAN: “HOW DO WE REACH THERE?”

We need a series of curricular reforms for the successful implementation of CBE in India.

1. The apex bodies of various health education branches have started the process of laying down the guidelines for the implementation of CBE
2. The health universities across the country are working on adapting these guidelines to suit their requirements
3. The institutions need to have a fully functional curriculum committee that orchestrates the whole process of CBE implementation
4. Faculty development programs are to be conducted on a regular basis to enhance the understanding of CBE among the teachers
5. The teachers should be well trained to derive objectives for a particular competency and align their teaching-learning methods in parlance with the objectives
6. Innovative and interactive teaching strategies should be adopted to improve learner participation
7. More emphasis has to be given to formative assessment and feedback to facilitate the acquisition of competency by the students
8. The summative assessments should ensure a certification scheme for the predefined competencies for that grade.

The process of CBE implementation will require sustained motivation on the part of all the stakeholders involved. The outcome of this approach will definitely have far-reaching benefits to the society in the form of highly competent health professionals. However, there will be a plethora of challenges that will be encountered during the implementation. All said and done, we as a nation are

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already on the path of adapting to this paradigm shift and sooner or later will reap the benefits of it.

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