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Which health topics inspire medical students to undertake research?

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Abstract

Abstract of a presentation at the AMEE 2015 conference, 4-9 September, Glasgow, United Kingdom.

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Which health topics inspire medical students to undertake research?

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Background: The development and practice of authentic inquiry during medical training can influence future practice through an understanding of research findings and their application to patient care, as well as developing the research interests and research capacity of future doctors. Self-proposed projects are useful ways in which to motivate and inspire medical students to undertake research and to learn more about different health issues.

Summary of Work: During a 12-month clerkship placement, all University of Wollongong (UOW) medical students design and undertake a research project which is of personal interest to themselves and relevant to their regional/rural placement communities. This study explored the most popular self-selected health issues investigated by students as part of their research projects.

Summary of Results: The first five UOW medical student cohorts, placed in ten different regional/rural community settings, completed 370 individual research projects between 2009 and 2013. The most popular research areas investigated by the students included: cancer prevention and screening; medication management issues; immunisation; diabetes management; primary health care and mental health issues; as well as emergency department presentations. Many of these research studies have since been published in peer reviewed journals and presented at national/international conferences.

Discussion and Conclusions: Building research capacity among medical students can significantly contribute to graduating evidence-based practitioners. To effectively engage students in undertaking research it is imperative that they be allowed to investigate health issues which both excite and inspire them to learn.

Take-home messages: Self-selected and self-proposed research projects are pivotal to engage students in authentic learning experiences which can help to influence their future practice.