

Effective Oncology teaching to Medical Undergraduates: A Systematic Review

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Background

Cancer is still one of the most common causes of death worldwide and thus it is critical to analyse how it is being taught at undergraduate level. This research compares current methods of undergraduate oncology teaching to ascertain which methods are most effective in improving both student confidence and clinical competence.

Methods

A systematic review of the literature was conducted; searches were performed in MEDLINE, EMBASE, Web of Science, Education Research Complete and the Cochrane Library.

Results

Very few comparative studies were elucidated by the search; only two studies directly compared teaching methods. 17 studies were included to demonstrate effective teaching principles that improved student confidence, and clinical ability. The use of new technologies such as virtual learning environments can enhance learning but cannot entirely replace clinical teaching and direct patient contact. Clinical clerkships appear to be more effective when taught with didactic components that enhance learning. Shorter learning programmes outside of the curriculum can improve student understanding and interest in oncology, and these do not need to be lengthy undertakings to show effects.

Conclusion

This study has found 17 articles on oncology teaching at undergraduate level further to Gaffan et al.'s original paper that fit the inclusion criteria. Oncology teaching needs to be less disparate in the curriculum, with multi-modal methods of teaching and should ideally include as much direct patient contact as is feasible. Further studies should be conducted to directly compare methods, and knowledge level to discern how best to improve oncology curricula.

