

USAGE OF COMPUTERS AND INTERNET AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS OF THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE, PERADENIYA

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Introduction

We are living in the information age. Thus it is assumed that the present generation of medical students is conversant with the use of computers for information search, problem solving, socialization and recreation. On the other hand, one of the objectives of higher education is to enhance active learning skills of the graduates. In this regard, www. internet is a very useful learning tool for those who want to enrich their knowledge and access information unlimitedly. Moreover, the 'personal computer' has revolutionized the techniques of education in many fields of study and Medicine is no exception. Most medical schools have introduced and adopted the use of computers in their teaching and learning programs.

Many surveys have been conducted to obtain information on the use of computers and internet among medical and dental students (Odusanya & Bamgbala, 2002; Virtanen & Nieminen, 2002; Rajab and Baqain, 2005; Link & Marz, 2006; Unnikrishnan *et al.*, 2008). However, a gap is seen in documentation of similar findings among medical students within the last 5 years in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya

(FOMUP). The objective of this survey is to investigate the current ground situation in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya with respect to the availability of facilities and use of ICT and to generate information to help the administrators to draw up a plan on improving the learning environment and incorporating ICT based learning activities in the curriculum.

Materials and Methods

A tailor made questionnaire with mostly closed items and a few open ended items seeking information on computer and internet accessibility and usage was developed by the authors. Some of the items were taken from the questionnaire used by Unnikrishnan *et al.*, (2008) in a similar study among a group of Indian medical students. The printed questionnaires were administered to all the students present at the end of a lecture to each batch from first to final year in April month 2010. The participation was voluntary and anonymous. The data were coded and entered into an Excel work sheet and the percentages were computed for each response category.

Results

The response rate was 68.4% (544/795 students). Although 70% of

the students reported that they have access to computers only 18.3% of them were using it on a daily basis. Of these students, 58% reported that they have a computer at home while 32% stated they accessed from the faculty IT centre, 4% from hostel 2% cyber café. The survey revealed that only 1% of the medical students reported that they used the facilities at the university IT centre.

Regarding accessibility to a computer and internet facility it varied from 65% to 82% however a significant difference could not be observed between batches. Medical students seemed to be accessing internet mainly at the Faculty e library (51%), followed by home (40%), cyber café (5%), University IT centre 2%, and hostel (1%). A vast majority of Medical students (81%) reported that they gain knowledge mainly by referring text books while only 13% used internet and 5% used electronic documents for the same purpose. The responses with regard to the purpose of computer usage 39% stated that they use it for entertainment, 33% to access internet, 25% purely for academic purposes. Among those who used computers for studying, 50% used it to refer journals, e books and other electronic documents while 30% have used it to revise power point presentations. Others have made use of it for interactive learning programs (10%), listen to recorded lectures. A majority of students (52%) reported that Internet was used mainly for academic purposes, while 20% stated mainly for social networking.

Discussion

Although a reasonable proportion

have access to computers, a very few reported the use of computers on a daily basis. The local situation with respect to access to one's own computer seems to be very much less than in the Indian study. Unnikrishnan *et al.* reported that more than 70% of their first year students possessed a computer. Regarding the usage of internet and computers for learning purposes, Odusanya and Bamgbala (2002) noted that only 23% of the Nigerian students used internet for medical research. According to Rajab and Baqain (2005), Dental students had the luxury of unlimited access to internet though they used it mainly for personal activities than for academic work. However, according to the Indian study the first and second years preferred internet to obtain information while it was not the case with Sri Lankans. Virtanen and Nieminen (2002) reported that more than 80% of dental students reported to have used electronic data bases in their second year. They also commented on a trend of younger students using ICT more in their education which was not apparent in our study. It appears that the MBBS program at the FOMUP, particularly the first two years, needs to find ways to stimulate the students to use computers/ internet more frequently. The computer usage for academic work seems to increase as the students advance and may be they refer more up to date information in the latter part of their training. Similar trend has been observed among Indian students. It is a desirable trend as graduates are expected to be more self directed in learning with ICT. Considering the advantages of e

learning it is desirable that the university improve the faculty based IT facilities for the benefit of almost one half of the students who do not have a computer of their own. As a second step incorporate e learning into the curriculum promoting self directed learning, which is an important goal of medical education.

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