

ANALYSIS OF THE OPINION OF MEDICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS OF THE QUALITY OF THE PROVIDED EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

The results from our own empirical research into the organizational and methodological issues in medical education and training are presented, and guidance for quality and academic standard assurance, consistent with the needs of the students, is provided. According to the evaluation of the training, from the point of view of students majoring as Physiotherapists and Pharmacy technicians, the characteristics have been defined, and these characteristics have a prognostic value for future evaluations, as well as practical significance in determining high-quality education and training. An original survey card has been developed for assessing the opinion of the students for the purpose of

acquiring deeper understanding and knowledge of the quality of the students' training and identifying the factors determining their satisfaction with their education and training, as well as with the expected professional development and career. This survey is aimed at presenting the opinion of students majoring as Physiotherapists and Pharmacy technicians of the quality of education and training provided by Medical College – Plovdiv, and its impact on their adequate preparation for a future career.

KEYWORDS: quality of education and training, educational service, students majoring as Physiotherapists and Pharmacy technicians.

The concept of quality assurance is aimed at attaining such an organization and content of higher education that are commensurate in terms of attractiveness for students from Europe and overseas. The quality of the education and training should ensure all the advantages that students are looking for in connection with the acquisition of professional qualifications providing maximum opportunities for successful employment (Radevska, I. 2004). On the

basis of the good European practices, higher education providers have to rank as a key factor in their activities student satisfaction with the provided educational service.

Quality in education is viewed as the degree to which the set of properties and characteristics of the evaluated unit (structure, process, activity, department) corresponds to the dynamically changing objective, need or expectation (academic standard, aim of the major, the subject, course, etc.) (Peeva, K., 2013).

The improvement of the academic quality of education and training, and the enhanced employability of the specialists are a priority for the management of Medical College – Plovdiv. This institution of higher education has a thorough concept of the quality of education and training, and the process of its implementation. This concept has been developed in adequate response to the need for being part of the higher education reforms in the country, in compliance with the strategic recommendations and guidelines for the development of higher education, determined by the Bologna process and our accession to the European educational area.

The development of medical education in Bulgaria has encountered numerous difficulties and challenges. The significance of this education and training is determined by the need for medical education and training aimed at and consistent with the actual health problems of our modern society, the need to train specialists able to tackle these problems (Markova, K. 2013).

As it is stated in a series of publications, the very concept of “quality of higher education” is an “elusive one”, it is “loaded with values”, and there is no sufficiently convincing theory on the topic (Newton, 2007; Westerheijden, 1999).

Our interest in the quality of medical education and the students’ opinion of it, in particular, is based on their position of users or beneficiaries. High quality medical education is determined by the extent to which the product – that is, education – meets the expectations and fulfills the aims of the user – the student – in the process of receiving this education.

In accordance with the European standards, significant reforms have been carried out in recent years in the education and training of health care professionals. All this has resulted in a series of changes aimed at adapting the whole education and training of these specialists to the regulations on higher education and to the modern trends in the development of the

Health Care professions. In this respect, students are trained not only to perform certain medical activities and manipulations but also to develop into specialists able to make independent decisions within their professional competence. The syllabuses of the courses/subjects in the field of health care have been developed in the past five years, and fully reflect the new developments and contents of the syllabuses in the other EU countries. Health Care tutors and professors are trained and qualified under various European projects and are in constant contact with the other professionals. All new information and multi-media technologies are used in the process of education and training.

In order to increase the requirements to the training of Health Care specialists and harmonize it with that in the other EU countries, the quality assurance system functions through structures developed at 4 levels.

- Control and improvement of the quality of teaching;
- Improvement and harmonization of the training in the various majors;
- Control of the quality of teaching and training;
- Overall control and provision of competitive education and training.

The quality of medical education and training is determined by various parameters which should ensure the adaptability and adequacy of the training process. The main factors determining the quality of education are.

- The qualifications of the university lecturer/tutor;
- Ethical norms in medical education;
- Correspondence between the modern scientific and technological level of medicine and education;
- Psychological-social culture of the students;
- Adequacy of the remuneration for educational work, and, in particular, dependence of the remuneration on the quality of teaching;
- Competent management of education.

The quality of medical education and training is dependent on many factors; it is difficult to establish and control. In the process of the modern reforms in education, special attention and priority is given to the problem of assessment and management of the quality of medical education.

Nowadays, the analysis of the students' opinion of the objective reality plays a more and more important role as a criterion for the quality of education.

The discussion and announcement of the efficiency of the results connected with the management of the quality of education has been achieved through ensuring a regular feedback from the students at the Medical College.

The aim of this study is to present the opinion of students majoring as Physiotherapists and Pharmacy technicians of the quality of education and training at Medical College, Plovdiv, and its impact on their adequate competence for their future employability and professional careers.

The subjects of the study were **182** 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students majoring as Physiotherapists and Pharmacy technicians at Medical College, Plovdiv. **98** of them were future Physiotherapists ($53,85\% \pm 5,04$), 51 of whom were men, and 47 – women, and the students majoring as Pharmacy Technicians were **84** ($46,15\% \pm 5,44$) - 19 male and 65 female (Diagram 1). The average age of the subjects was 20.6. The survey was conducted in the academic year of 2015/2016.

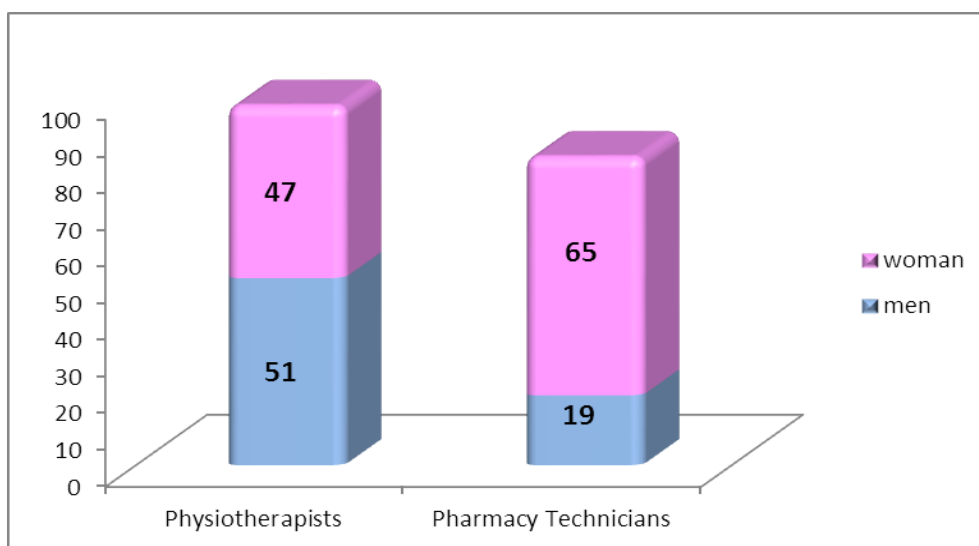


Diagram 1: Breakdown of the subjects by gender.

In the process of the survey, the following methods were used: documental, analysis of the sources of reference, sociological method and pedagogical monitoring of the parameters and indicators related to the whole educational process. The evaluation of the separate aspects of the opinion in most cases is based on the five-point Likert scale.

The opinion of the students was studied by means of a sociological survey and realtime interviews during the terms. The survey card included 25 cloze and open questions. The open questions gave students the opportunity to freely formulate their responses, without having to fit within frames set in advance.

In this article, we have analyzed only questions related to the students' opinion of the quality of the educational process. The results from the survey were processed using SPSS 19.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of great importance in evaluating the students' opinion are their motives in choosing their major at the Medical College. Two groups of motives were identified among the surveyed students.

Personal motives – interests, abilities, wishes, type of personality, and real chances of employment. Social motives – trends in the respective social group, opportunities for social communication with other persons sharing the same interests and attitudes (93, 88±2, 50% for the future Physiotherapists, and 83, 33±4, 45% for the future Pharmacy technicians).

What is striking in the analysis of the data on the motivation in choosing a profession is the fact that the main factor is the attractiveness of the most desirable majors: Physiotherapists and Pharmacy technicians, at Medical College, Plovdiv, followed by the relatively short length of the programmes – three years, the relatively low tuition fees, the good employment opportunities, and the good facilities of the College (See Table 1). All of the surveyed students were admitted in the major of their first choice at Medical College – Plovdiv, have reasonable expectations for a high-quality education, which will provide them with good employability and opportunities for a successful career.

Table 1: Motives in choosing a certain major at Medical College, Plovdiv.

Why did you choose this major at Medical College, Plovdiv?					
	Motives	Physiotherapist		Pharmacy technician	
		Number	%±Sp	Number	%±Sp
1.	This was my first choice	98	100%	84	100%
2.	Shorter length of the Programme	32	32,65±8,29	37	44,05±8,16
3.	Opportunities for a successful career	88	89,80±3,23	84	100%
4.	The good facilities at Medical College, Plovdiv	35	35,71±8,09	32	38,09±8,58
5.	Family tradition	8	8,16±9,68	23	27,38±9,31
6.	Other	6	6,12±9,79	3	3,57%

The majors offered by the Medical College prove to be competitive, attractive and modern, in keeping with the needs of Health Care. The major factor for the student satisfaction are the opportunities for finding employment easily on the labour market, even before graduation (89, 80±3, 23% of Physiotherapists, and 100% of the Pharmacy technicians).

In response to the question whether they were acquainted with the qualification characteristics of the major, with the Programme curriculum and syllabi for the separate courses, 81, 63±4, 33% of the Physiotherapists and 92, 86±2, 16% of the Pharmacy technicians provided a positive answer.

Lecture attendance, practical training and traineeship were pointed out by approximately 87, 91±2, 58% of the surveyed students.

97 of the respondents (53, 29±5, 07%) (Diagram 2) declared full and high-level satisfaction with the benefits of the knowledge the students from the two majors mastered during lectures. They believed the lectures were up-to-date and consistent with the needs of the medical practice, and reflecting the latest advances in their major.

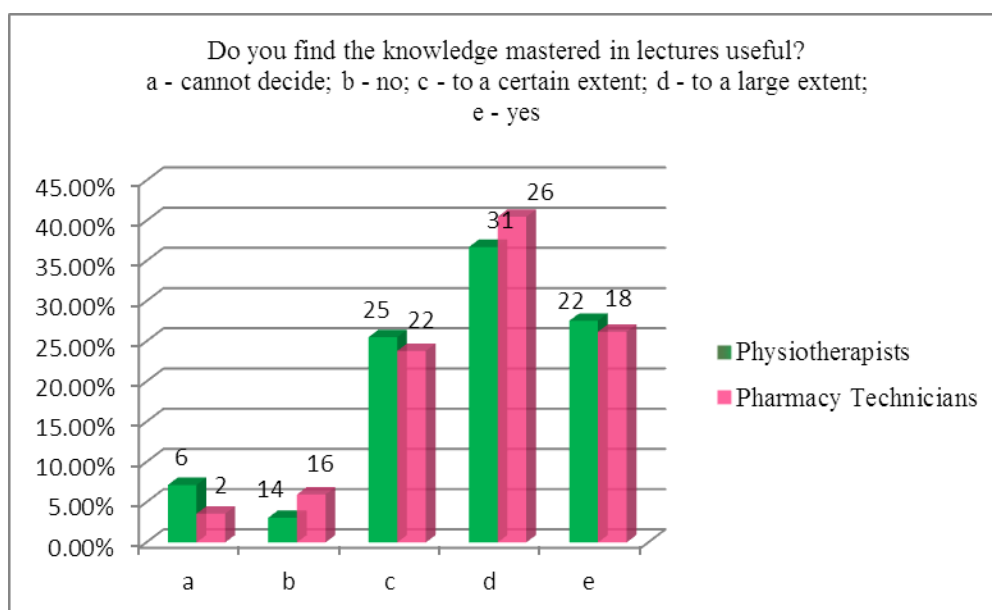


Diagram 2: Satisfaction with the usefulness of the knowledge acquired through lectures.

Students' satisfaction with the usefulness of the knowledge and skills acquired during practical training and traineeship was much higher as compared to that with lectures. 119 students (65, 38±4, 36%) from both majors stated they were completely or highly satisfied. Only 8 students (4, 41±7, 25%) gave a negative answer, meaning they were dissatisfied

(Diagram 3). It should be pointed out that students from both majors showed a higher level of satisfaction with tutorials and practical training as compared to that with lectures.

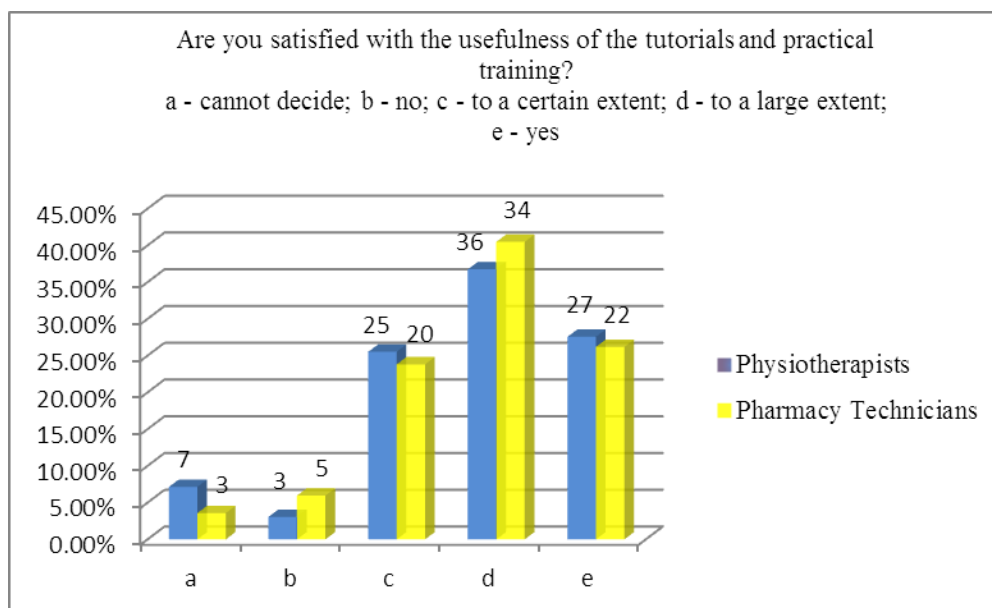


Diagram 3: Satisfaction with the usefulness of the acquired knowledge and skills in the course of tutorials and practical training.

As regards the quality of teaching, there is no significant difference in the answers provided by students majoring as Physiotherapists and those majoring as Pharmacy technicians. According to 82, 41 ± 3 , 11% of the surveyed students, the material is taught in a clear and comprehensible way, and only 12, 64 ± 6 , 93% consider the level of teaching inadequate. The tempo of teaching is believed to be fast by 38, 46% and normal - by 59, 89%.

Questions concerning the quality of the taught lectures are of special interest. A total of 46, 71 ± 5 , 41% of the surveyed students believe lecturers mostly read and dictate lectures prepared in advance. According to 36, 73 ± 8 , 03% of the future Physiotherapists and 38, 09 ± 8 , 33% of the future Pharmacy technicians, lecturers present their lectures in an interesting way every time; about 40% of the surveyed believe lectures are presented in an interest-provoking way almost every time; 23, 46 ± 8 , 84% of the Physiotherapists and 21, 43 ± 9 , 67% of the Pharmacy technicians think this happens rarely or occasionally. Only 28, 02% of the surveyed believe lecturers engage students in discussions almost every time, thus creating an interesting academic atmosphere and stimulating individual thinking; whereas 41, 76% and 30, 22% of the surveyed believe this rarely or hardly ever happens, respectively.

Lecturers and tutors are considered tolerant, communicative and motivated in their work most of the time by 54, 39±5, 01% of the surveyed students; whereas 27, 47% and 18, 14% of the respondents think it happens sometimes or never, respectively. According to 59, 89±4, 69% of the surveyed, lecturers and tutors stimulate students to develop professional skills, a sense of responsibility, observation, ability to work in a team, communication skills, ability to make decisions, to think creatively, etc.

The level of tutorials and lab exercises is considered very good, as a whole. The efforts of tutors were assessed as 'very good' and 'good'. 60.21% of the Physiotherapists and 58.33% of the Pharmacy technicians rated their tutors and tutorials as "very good"; 32.65% of the Physiotherapists and 41.67% of the Pharmacy technicians – as "good"; and only 7.14% of the Physiotherapists rated them as "satisfactory".

The results of the survey show the high opinion students have of the level of teaching and of the attitude of lecturers and tutors to them. According to 85.16% of the surveyed the level of teaching is high or mostly high. Lecturers and tutors are well-prepared and experienced, according to 58.79%; mostly well prepared and experienced – according to 34.06%; and given an overall high assessment by 92.85% of the students. 78.02% believe their lecturers and tutors to be fair and accessible outside classes, taking an interest in and showing understanding to their students' problems. The overall conclusion is that students consider their lecturers and tutors well-prepared, competent and having a very good attitude to their students. There are no statistically significant differences in the opinion of the students from the two majors ($P < 0.05$).

In assessing the educational service, the subjective opinion of students has to be taken into account, since the availability of one resource or another does not necessarily mean it is used to the maximum. An object of special attention is those aspects of the process of education that have received the disapproval of the students: 28,02% of the surveyed students gave poor rating to the individual work with tutors during tutorials and lab exercises; 26, 37% - the administrative service; 29, 12% - the facilities; 21, 98% - the objectivity of assessment; 24, 73% - the opportunity to express their personal opinion, and 37,91% - the opportunities for scientific research and acquainting students with the scientific achievements of their lecturers and tutors.

The access of students in health care students to participation in scientific research projects is still unsatisfactory. The opportunities given by scientific research to students from all medical majors to acquire research competence are not fully utilized.

The comparative analysis of the results of this survey and of the opinion poll of the lecturers and tutors carried out in November 2015 regarding the quality of the educational process at Medical College, Plovdiv, shows that although students and teachers share the same academic environment, they live in different worlds. Students and teachers differ significantly not only in their evaluation of the way in which the Medical College functions, but also and mostly in their evaluation of the quality of the educational process. Unlike students, teachers give higher rating to all aspects of the teaching process. Two trends deserve attention, however. The rating given by teachers is too high – with a maximum rating of “very good”, almost all components of the educational process are rated as “good” by teachers, on average. A similar lack of critical attitude, however, can be quite dangerous because it does not create motivation for improvement. There are some significant differences in the rating given by students and that by teachers. The individual work with teachers is rated as “satisfactory” by the surveyed students, and as “good” by the teachers; the presence of objective criteria is rated as “unsatisfactory” by the students, and as “good” by the teachers; the situation with the opportunity to express personal opinion is similar. The differences are even greater when we compare the percentage of those expressing the highest and the lowest degree of satisfaction. Thus 16, 48±6, 77% of the students and almost twice the percentage of teachers – 31, 82±10, 16%, declare that they consider the quality the overall process of training and education is organized and conducted at Medical College, Plovdiv, as “excellent” and they are completely satisfied with it, and only 1, 52% of the teachers are dissatisfied with it.

The summed up results of our survey show that the high rating given to the lecturers and tutors is determined by their ability to present the new material in a clear and comprehensible way, to create a truly academic atmosphere and to stimulate creative thinking and discussions among the students, as well as to be objective in assessing their students. What is striking is that students’ satisfaction depends more on the quality of teaching (characteristics of the lecturer/tutor, manner and clarity of presenting the new material, enthusiasm, etc.), and not on other factors, such as library service, electronic services, teaching materials, facilities, etc.

The fact that more than half of the surveyed students express a high level of satisfaction with the quality of all components of the process of education and training. Using a five-point scale, the average assessment of the quality of all components of the process of teaching and education, according to 67, 34 ± 5 , 77% of the students majoring as Physiotherapists is above “very good” (4, 50), and according to 59, 52 ± 6 , 94% of the students majoring as Pharmacy technicians – it is “good”.

As a whole, the percentage of students that are totally dissatisfied with their education and training at Medical College, Plovdiv, is not high – a mere 4.95% (“poor”- 1.65%, and “satisfactory” – 3.30%) of the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

Quality education and training are determined by the opportunities provided to students to develop in accordance with their own desires and needs, to form key competences, universal in their nature and applicability, the level of which is connected with the level of the acquired knowledge and skills.

It is of vital importance for every university to maintain high standards of medical education and training, which will provide graduates with the scientific theoretical knowledge and practical skills they will need in their medical practice.

As a summary of the conducted survey, it can be concluded that the students majoring as Physiotherapists and Pharmacy technicians have a high opinion of the provided educational service. The survey also allows us not only to draw conclusions regarding the level of the process of education and training, but also to identify factors affecting the quality of this process. In order to achieve a higher level of satisfaction, attention has to be paid to some of the attributes of the educational service: improvement of the facilities, improvement of the administrative service, improvement of the organization of the process of education and training; creation of conditions for communication of students with future employers so that students could gather more information on the applicability of the acquired knowledge and skills in their future work, and orient themselves better with regard to employability and the labour market.

The survey of the quality reflecting students’ satisfaction should serve as a starting point in developing marketing strategies of the universities and colleges in the country at this modern

stage of the development of market economy. Due to the lack of traditions in applying marketing principles, relatively few universities and colleges carry out surveys of the satisfaction of the users and the market needs (Lusch, 2006).

The survey of students' opinion of the quality of the provided educational service is also connected with the evaluation of the competitiveness of the Medical College. This poses new challenges to the medical education and training, and an immediate responsibility of medical colleges related to the monitoring of the entire process of education and training.

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