Social Responsibility Programs may Strengthen the Medical Students’ Role to Fight against COVID-19 Pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic has reminded the gaps in medical education to respond to extraordinary situations in health-related issues. All sectors question their positions to fill such gaps to be prepared for possible future situations.

As pandemic has more than one-dimension, medical students should be prepared for not excluding community component. It is quite understandable that unexpected and abrupt situations due to the pandemic interrupted to respond to the needs properly. However, systematic, and community-based programs to cover the needs of the population can be helpful for this purpose.

In Turkey, face-to-face education was interrupted in medical faculty due to the measures taken to be prevented from COVID-19 pandemic and medical students had to stay at home as a restrictive measure of the Government. Because of their age, Phase 1 students had to stay at home due to legal legislations.

“We, as well, are in the Fight Against Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)!“ online Social Responsibility Project has been developed as a part of Phase 1 Medicine and Social Responsibility Program to increase the social responsibility, awareness and sensitivity of the students in pandemic days. The Project has objectives for the students like learning evidence-based scientific information on the issue and experiencing to feel the responsibility in sharing the correct information with the population. Such experience is expected to be an important achievement for medical students who are the physicians of the future.

In this paper, we aimed to explain the details of the project as a model to be used in medical education in the COVID-19 fight.

MATERIAL and METHODS

All project development and implementation phases were developed in collaborative work with Faculty Dean’s Office, Project Coordination Team, facilitators, and project groups student representatives.

Due to the limited social life, students informed the target groups via web-based communication methods. Information and other steps of the Project were planned, implemented, and monitored in 33 project groups under the guidance of the facilitators. The originally produced materials were shared by the students with the target groups via social media such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp groups between May 15 and 31, 2020. All materials were shared simultaneously via the official website of Hacettepe University Faculty of Medicine.

Four major target groups, including general society, 65 years and older individuals and individuals with chronic diseases, teenagers (children staying at home-adolescent), and women who have just given birth were determined as the project groups.

Ethical approval was not obtained for this paper as the content is focused on the explanation of the Program content.

RESULTS

Various types of materials like reminders, infographics, videos, and other visuals have been prepared for the Project. Students shared the content using all these materials. International students of the Faculty translated some materials into different languages to share the materials in their home-countries. The materials were prepared by the BPSR Coordination team by having the opinions and suggestions of the faculty members and students. The details of the materials are shown in Table 1. Figure 1 shows selected prepared materials produced in Turkish.
The Project ended at the end of May 2020. Written and/or oral feedback of the students and consultants have been taken during June and July 2020. Reflections of the students were also taken.

**DISCUSSION**

Novel Coronavirus Disease COVID-19 highlighted the need for paradigm shift on medical education. Various thoughts have been shared in this context¹. Public health perspective in medical education should be strengthened as COVID-19 has demonstrated the need to improve in participation, collaboration, and advocacy responsibilities of the physicians into the public health systems as graduates of medical faculties². Medical education systems should prepare their graduates with this perspective in which different models fitting to the local needs looking at the “bigger” picture at the global level.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, “*We, as well, are in the Fight Against Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)!*” is thought to facilitate to improve the sensitivity of the students in the COVID-19 crisis. The Project has also contributed improving the students’ capacity in the management of infodemic and accessing the community. Similar Projects should be developed and implemented in the routine medical education system to be much more prepared for the future crisis as a routine body of the education system in the global perspective.

**LIMITATIONS**

Online feature of the Project is the major limitation of the Project.

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**Table 1. Materials of the “We, as well, are in the fight against COVID-19!” Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material type (number)</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infographics (5)</td>
<td>1. Social / Physical Distancing!&lt;br&gt;2. Wearing Face Masks Properly&lt;br&gt;3. COVID-19 and Tobacco Use&lt;br&gt;4. COVID-19 and 65 Years of Age and Older People&lt;br&gt;5. 10 Recommendations for Children, Adolescents and Parents</td>
<td>Turkish, English, Arabic, Albanian, Greek, Azeri, Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video (1)</td>
<td>1. Messages from HUFM Phase I Students</td>
<td>Arabic with English subtitle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video (2)</td>
<td>2. Narrative; “Pathetic End” of “Novel Coronavirus”</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Examples of the prepared materials (in Turkish).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CONFLICT of INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

REFERENCES


