Time management among first year medical students

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Abstract

Introduction: Efficient time management is one of the essential skills, set for medical students. Action priority matrix helps the students to categorize their plans and avoid wasting time in unnecessary activities. **Aim:** This study is aimed to assess the time management skill among medical students and make them categorize their priorities. **Materials and methods**: A total of 145 first MBBS students (60 boys and 85 girls) participated in this study. All the students were asked to answer the Time management questionnaire. After a brief session on time management, they were divided into 7groups (20/20+ each) and were subjected to different group activities. The students were asked to prioritise their plans and actions based on action priority matrix. The scores were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Content analysis was done for the responses regarding priorities and feedback from the students. **Results and discussion:** 74.48% had average and below average time management scores. The mean score among girls was 47.47 and among boys was 47.9. There was no significant difference between boys and girls (p=0.76). Content analysis of Action Priority matrix showed that most of the students wanted to plan and schedule their daily routine activities and follow them regularly. Also, most of the students identified social media as the main distractor. **Conclusion:** This study throws light on the need of time management workshops to students from the first year onwards since they have to accustom to the volumes of the subjects-related works within the given short period.

Key words: action priority matrix, social media, time management

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Introduction

Time management is the ability of a student to utilize time effectively by planning and implementing mindful control to increase efficiency and productivity.[1]Efficient time management is one of the essential skills set for medical students. The students are often given with deadlines for college works at the same time and unless the students plan ahead, he/she will find it difficult to manage. The importance of time management was not routinely emphasized in undergraduate or postgraduate medical education curricula.[2] This has often resulted in the development of poor time-management practices. Cureus et al[1] in their review on needs assessment declared that there were very few published articles related to an integrated curriculum on time management and other soft skills of

professionalism. This gap has been sensitized and relooked in the current Competency-based Medical Curriculum, wherein time management skills has been emphasised as one of the professional competencies and the same has been decided to be emphasized during foundation course. Improving time-management practices may lead to decreased stress, increased productivity, and improved well-being for physicians.[3] The Action Priority matrix, also called as the Eisenhower's matrix or Urgent-Important matrix, is a powerful tool for increasing productivity and improving time management and help people manage their time more effectively.[4] This is one of the self-management techniques. According to this matrix, one has to define the priorities of the task ahead of him/her, under one of the four categories, viz. important and urgent (crisis), important and non-urgent (Goals and planning), urgent and not-important (Interruptions) and not-urgent and not-important (Distractions). This short study is done to assess the needs of the students regarding time management and to impart them with some of the time management techniques by applying the Action Priority matrix.

Materials and Methods

This study was done including 145 First year MBBS students (60 boys and 85 girls) during their foundation course after getting concurrence from the Institutional Ethics Committee. As per MCI's guidance on conducting the foundation course, a 3-hour session was given for the competency on time management (FC 4.9)[2] which comes under Professional development and Ethics Module. This session was done as three parts. In the first part, all the students were asked to answer the standardized "Time Management Assessment" questionnaire [Appendix 1]. The scores of this questionnaire range form 0 – 80 and is graded as

time management skills are Good (54 or higher), time management skills average (46 – 53), time management skills could use some work (36 – 45) and poor (35 and below). In second part, the students were given a half an hour interactive lecture on the importance of time management by one of the authors. Then, the students were then divided into seven small groups of 20/20+ each and different time management group activities like 'The ribbon of life', 'Ace of spaces', 'Puzzle challenge without big picture', 'Puzzle challenge with big picture', 'Arranging the cards', 'Paper boat' and 'Time squared'. These activities were given for them to understand the importance of time management. As a final part, the students were asked to identify their priorities, distractors and interrupters with respect to academic and extra-academic activities using an "ACTION PRIORITY MATRIX" [Appendix 2], which is one of the self-management techniques. The students were asked to give the feedback regarding the session and also their idea of improving themselves with their time management issues. Data were entered in MS Excel. A quantitative percentage analysis was done using MS Excel, for time management scores of the students. Qualitative Content analysis was done for the responses from Action priority Matrix and the feedback from the students.

Results and discussion

Out of 145 first MBBS students, 60 were boys and 85 were girls. Time management score analysis under various grades is showed in Table 1. 74.48 % of the students have average and below average scores of time management. The mean scores are 47.47 among girls and 47.9 among boys. There was no significant difference in the scores between girls and boys (p=0.76, done by Student's Unpaired T test)

Table 1. Time management scores of the study participants

Time Management grades	Time Management scores	MALE (Percentage)	FEMALE (Percentage)	Both (Percentage)
Poor	35 and less	6 (10)	7(8.2)	13(8.97)
Can do some works	36 - 45	17(28.3)	31(36.5)	48(33.10)
Average	46 - 53	20 (33.3)	27(31.8)	47(32.41)
Good	54 and above	17(28.3)	20(23.5)	37(25.52)

For discussion purpose, we considered combined average and below average grades ('Can do some works' and 'Poor' grades) together.

Table 2. shows the content analysis of the Action priority matrix revealed that the top priorities of their actions under different category of Eisenhower's action priority matrix

Table 2. Content analysis of Action Priority Matrix.

Do it today (Emergency/crisis)	Decide (Planning and scheduling)	Delegate (Interruptions)	Delete (Distractions)
1. Will study now 2. To make a schedule for studies 3. To complete assignments and prepare for exams 4. To keep the body and mind fit and healthy 5. To develop better communication skills	1. To go for PG studies 2. To have short-term work goals 3. To get good marks and become a successful in research 4. To become a good doctor in future 5. To become a specialist in gastroenterology 6. To read subjects at least 2 hours a day 7. To get ready for NEXT exam 8. Finish off studying daily portions	1. Share the tasks whenever it is urgent 2. Make parents get routine things like booking travel tickets 3. Washing clothes 4. Friends for skit practice 5. Attending unimportant functions 6. Involving in family-related disputes	1. Unwanted thinking/ imagination 2. Playing with video games 3. Laziness and worrying 4. Delete my bitter experiences in the past 5. Stop watching television and avoiding social media, watching you tube videos 6. Avoid gossiping and chatting 7. Deletion of anger 8. Interactions with negative people

*These are the open comments from the students for different category of the matrix.

Feedback from the students

Feedback on the entire session was obtained via Google form and analysed. 93% of the students felt it was a very important topic to be trained in. 72% of the students have claimed that they have become knowledgeable after attending the session. 95 % of the students felt encouraged and they have commented that they will be using the techniques taught in real life. Few of the open comments from the sessions were as follows.

"Time management session suggested all practical ways to manage time"

"It is very important for me because I have to study an ocean of subject with a very short time"

"I am highly motivated by this session"

"I will rightly plan my actions for my betterment"

"The activities were really fun and we could understand the importance of time management easily".

Discussion

In this study, majority of the medical students (74.48%) were having average and less than average time management skills. A similar study by Hill et.al has also identified poor time management and work-life imbalance as one of their major stressors among medical students.[5]The absence of difference in scores between girls and boys in all grades of time management, suggests that both genders are equally lacking in time management. This may be because, in a majority of schools, soft skills like time and stress management have been least emphasized.

The group activities on time management kindled their active involvement as well made them realise the importance, both individually as well as a group. The students were taught about the self-management techniques using Action-Priority Matrix and they were able to identify the priority of the actions ahead of them. Many students understood the importance of planning and scheduling their course related activities. Also, many commented that they should avoid procrastinating their daily portions, failing which, they will suffer from a voluminous backlog. Abdulghani,H.M et al also recorded a similar feedback from the study participants as ''If we don't study every day and we just memorise at the last minute we have to face problems'' and ''As a medical student, our exam is continuous and every 2–3 weeks we have an exam. If we take a little break from study, we notice that we miss a lot of lectures and we can't go back to the previous week. The major problem with the students is 'last minute study".[6]

A majority of students identified that wasting time in social networks as the greatest distractors and wanted to avoid it completely. In a study by Alahmar et al on medical students, the author suggested that the average time spent on social media was around 6.8 hours and it may have a negative impact on students' grades.[7]Studies have also shown negative correlation between attention span, academic performance and online social networking in their study.[8,9]

The importance of time management was well understood by a majority of students after the session. This makes it clear that time-management workshops are most needed for students.

Time is one of the greatest assets and in modern-day medicine where enormous learning resources are available, time management becomes a challenge for medical students. The right approach to time management enables students to improve their study-life balance enormously by making the right choices from the onset, such as how to prioritize their tasks.[1]Providing students with assistance and support in time management should help them utilise their study time more efficiently and effectively.

Conclusion

Time management skills of the first-year students were mostly average and below average. The students seem to understand the importance of time management after the session and could prioritize their actions clearly. More such workshops are needed frequently for the students and interns for improving the efficiency of their performance.

Limitations

The sample size was very small in this study and it was a feedback of only one workshop on time management. Also, follow-up survey has to be done to assess the change in their time management skills of the students and the reflection in their academic performance, as a result of such priming workshop.

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Conflict of interest: Nil

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APPENDIX – 1

Time Management Assessment

In responding to the statements below, fill in each blank with the number from the rating scale that indicates the frequency with which you do each activity. Assess your behavior as it is, not as you would like it to be.

Rating Scale 0 Never 1 Seldom 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always

____ 1. I read selectively, skimming the material until I find what is important, then highlighting it.

_____ 2. I make a list of tasks to accomplish each day.

_____ 3. I keep everything in its proper place at work.

_____ 4. I prioritize the tasks I have to do according to their importance and urgency.

_____ 5. I concentrate on only one important task at a time, but I do multiple trivial tasks at once

(such as signing letters while talking on the phone).

_____ 6. I make a list of short five- or ten-minute tasks to do.

_____ 7. I divide large projects into smaller, separate stages.

_____ 8. I identify which 20 percent of my tasks will produce 80 percent of the results.

_____ 9. I do the most important tasks at my best time during the day.

_____ 10. I have some time during each day when I can work uninterrupted.

_____ 11. I do today what needs to be done. I don't procrastinate.

_____ 12. I periodically evaluate the use of my time with devices such as a time log.

_____ 13. I set deadlines for myself.

_____ 14. I do something productive whenever I am waiting.

_____ 15. I do redundant "busy work" at one set time during the day.

_____ 16. I finish at least one thing every day.

_____ 17. I schedule some time during the day for personal time alone (for planning, meditation,

prayer, exercise).

_____ 18. I allow myself to worry about things only at one particular time during the day, not all the

time.

_____ 19. I have clearly defined long-term objectives toward which I am working.

_____ 20. I continually try to find little ways to use my time more efficiently.

Sex: Male/Female

APPENDIX – 2

Action priority matrix

Sex: Male/ female

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	**DO** *Do it now*	**DECIDE** *Schedule a time to do it*
NOT IMPORT	**DELEGATE** *Who can do it for you?*	**DELETE** *Eliminate or ignore it*