To learn, pharmacy students need to do: A pilot on learning asthma first aid

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Introduction

Instructional activities that promote active learning encourage developing pharmacy students’ knowledge and skills. To provide the technical skills that future pharmacists need, schools of pharmacy are moving from courses that predominantly offer knowledge to courses with a greater emphasis on acquirement of skills. The primary objective of this study was to assess the impact of two learning modalities (online training and simulation) on pharmacy students’ ability to perform asthma first (AFA). The secondary objective was to explore students’ preferred learning method for technical skills with the example used as AFA after exposure to two different learning modalities.

Design

Pharmacy students from Amman, Jordan were invited to participate in AFA training workshop. Students were assigned to one of two groups of 25 students to complete a 1-hour online training course in AFA or participate in scenario-based simulation as their first learning exposure. Student ability to perform AFA was assessed in role-playing scenarios using a checklist instrument. Students’ preferences on methods of learning, opinions and thoughts of the workshop were investigated by focus group discussion and semi-structured questionnaire.

Results

Eighteen students (n=50, 36%) were assessed on their skills to manage acute asthma exacerbation by simulation and provided with immediate formative feedback. Overall, 33.3% of all assessed students were deemed competent in AFA. A chi-square test for independence indicated no significant association between students’ performance in AFA and educational intervention, X² (1, n = 18) = 0.000, P = 1.00, phi = 0.00. Focus group discussions yielded three main ideas students considered important in their learning: blended learning methods, active learning opportunities; and novelty in learning.

Conclusion

Learning technical skills in pharmacy is facilitated when teaching design provides active learning opportunities that involve students ‘doing’ (practicing) particular skills, observing others perform these skills and receiving appropriate formative feedback to enhance performance.

Figure 1: Inhalers and spacer devices provided to students in the study