

LEARNT EXPERIENCES FROM COMMUNITY MEDICINE FIELDWORK, KHON KAEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Rational & Background: Fieldwork education should promote student-centered practice, self-directed learning, knowledgeable of community resources. Khon Kaen University, Thailand, has set up a fieldwork for community medicine. The learning purposes of each activity in the fieldwork have been set up and therefore should be evaluated.

Objectives: To determine whether the learning purposes of field work activities were achieved.

Methodology: Exact objective of each activity was clarified. The researcher participated in the field with the students. All 12 students who stayed in the same house of fieldwork were in-depth interviewed after finishing the fieldwork. Content analysis was performed and interpreted into learnt experiences.

Results: The students have learnt the villager's lifestyle which helped them to understand the correlation between lifestyle and illness. They learned about villager's culture which was reflected to people's health belief and attitude to health. They have learnt and understood better that villagers often chose alternative treatment instead of modern treatment which sometime included supernatural spirit. Staying with the villagers for 10 days trained the students to adapt themselves and taught them to work together as a team.

Conclusion: Community medicine fieldwork offered a way of learning and gaining experiences to students which may have significant impact on students' attitude to the community health.

KEYWORDS: Community Medicine, Ethnographic Medicine, Ethnography, Fieldwork Education.

INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork education is one kind of active learning methods. Fieldwork education makes students perceive values of learning in groups and gain experiences from being with the actual lively situations (Mc Allister *et al.*, 2010; Mason, 1998). The Faculty of Medicine in conjunction with the faculties of health alliances in Khon Kaen University had set up a community medicine fieldwork for students since 1983. This fieldwork has been designed for the students from various faculties of health sciences to go out together and stay with villagers in rural area of Thailand for 10 days. Several activities are set up for the students during the fieldwork. (*Course syllabus*: 374 351 Community Medicine and Family Medicine II, 2009). This fieldwork intends to

(1) encourage students to work together as a health care team,

- (2) enable students to understand rural people’s life style and
- (3) teach students to have good attitude towards the community

Evaluation of the course and fieldwork have been quantitatively performed regularly by the Department of Community Medicine, but qualitative evaluation has never been performed (*Course Evaluation: 374 351 Community Medicine and Family Medicine II, 2011*).

This study was, therefore, conducted to qualitatively determine what did the students learn from the fieldwork and what was the core value of the fieldwork.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Fieldwork’s handout was studied thoroughly. The exact objective of each activity was clarified. The researcher participated in the fieldwork with the students. The flow of learning process was drawn and used as a frame of evaluation. Figure 1 shows the learning process. All 12 students in the same house of the fieldwork were interviewed in-depth after finishing the course by using the structured interview form. Content analysis and data triangulation were performed (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001).

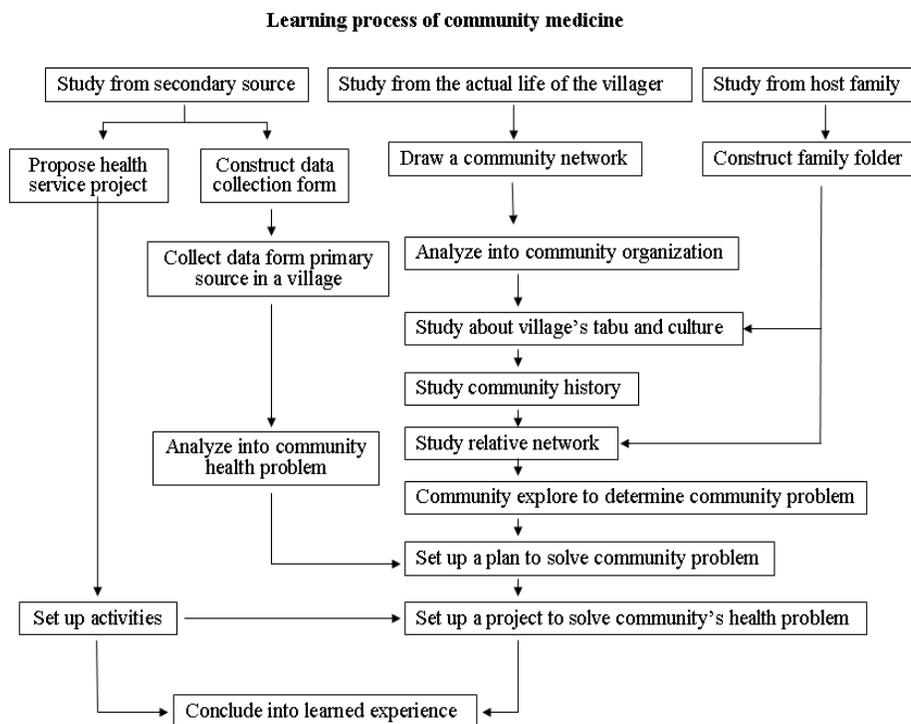


Figure 1. Learning Process of the Community Medicine, Khon Kaen University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

All of the students understood the objectives of the fieldwork and they could point out the purposes of each assigned activity. The results of this study revealed that fieldwork helped students to understand the villager's life style. Understanding of the villagers' life style helped them to draw correlation between life style and the illness. The students have experienced the villagers' culture and taboo which were reflected to the villagers' health belief and attitude to health. The students have learnt and understood better why the villagers prefer alternative medicine to treat their illnesses. Sometimes, the villagers relied upon supernatural spirits, not on the modern medical treatment, to heal their illnesses. Fieldwork and qualitative approach concerned primarily with how people see and understand their social worlds which is necessary for health science students to be more realistic when they graduate and go to work (Harden *et al.*, 2004). Fieldwork and qualitative approach may provide insights into the reasons why interventions succeed or fail (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

Recently, there is a growing interest in the application of ethnographic medicine in medical education. There also has a qualitative approach of social aspect for medical students. This approach offered other ways of knowledge, skill and attitude that had significant impact on medical education (Atkinson & Pugsley, 2005). Ethnography is the study of social interactions, peoples' behavior, and perceptions occurring within groups, teams, organizations, and communities. The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into peoples' views and actions, as well as the nature of the location they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observations and interviews (Dharamsi & Charles 2011; Reeves *et al.*, 2008; Atkins *et al.*, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The community medicine fieldwork set by Khon Kaen University followed the principle of ethnographic medicine. This fieldwork enabled the students to experience participant observation, interview and discussion to probe the emerging issues and ask questions regarding life and health. Fieldwork enabled the students to immerse themselves in a setting, thereby generating a rich understanding of people's attitude and allowed the students to see insight villager's behavior which normally hidden from the public gaze. Fieldwork allowed the students to practice on documentary data such as port folio, diary and minutes of meeting. The core value of community medicine fieldwork was building up students' attitude to people and community which should impact them to be good practitioners when they graduate.

This study had limitation on the number of study sample as we only interviewed from students who stayed in one house of the fieldwork. However, data triangulation showed the conclusive information. Further study should be conducted to monitor whether the good attitude of the students last until they graduate.

CONCLUSIONS

Community medicine fieldwork offered a way of learning and gaining experiences to the students and may have a significant impact on the students' attitude to patients and community in the future.

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