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Opinions on medical education, options and career choices of 4th year medical students

Ancuța Zazgyva^a, Sándor-György Zuh^{a*}, Septimiu Voidăzan^b, István Gergely^a, Tudor Sorin Pop^a

^aDepartment of Orthopaedics and Traumatology, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tîrgu Mureș, Gh. Marinescu 38, Tîrgu Mureș, 540139, Romania

^bDepartment of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tîrgu Mureș, Gh. Marinescu 38, Tîrgu Mureș, 540139, Romania

Abstract

The University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tîrgu Mureș is the only medical university in Romania that offers Hungarian-language education. We aimed to find out the opinions of 4th year Romanian and Hungarian-language students regarding education in our University, their learning habits, options, and future career choices. We found significant differences between the two student groups both in terms of learning habits and career choices. One of our most important finding was that the majority of Hungarian students considered that university education does not properly prepare them for the practice of medicine – a fact that should be given further consideration.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +4-074-542-6183; fax: +4-036-588-2537.

E-mail address: zuh.sandor@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Transylvania as a historical and geographical space is a perfect example of multiculturalism in the sense of a society with ethnic and cultural heterogeneity that is also indicated by multilingualism (Muscalagiu, 2008). Three major ethnic groups can be found here: Romanians, Hungarians and Germans.

The latest census shows that approximately 6.5% of Romania's population declare themselves to be of Hungarian ethnicity, thus making up the largest ethnic minority of Romania (National Institute of Statistics, 2011). The counties of Harghita and Covasna have a majority of Hungarian ethnics (85.2% and 73.7% respectively), with large numbers of Hungarians also found in the counties of Mureș, Satu Mare, Bihor and Sălaj. Furthermore, approximately 6.7% of the population declared Hungarian to be their mother tongue (National Institute of Statistics, 2011). Nevertheless, these numbers may be larger due to the fact that only 18.884.800 and 18.891.600 from the counted population of 20.121.641 declared their ethnicity and native language respectively, hence the importance of providing Hungarian language education at all academic levels. Although there are a number of higher education institutions in the country with courses in Hungarian, approximately 800 teaching staff and nearly 12.000 students (2.000- 2.200 new students per academic year), there is still a lack of offers for certain fields (Tonk, 2010).

Founded as the Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy in 1948, the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tîrgu Mureș is a multicultural public university in Romania and the only one that offers Hungarian language medical education. This important characteristic of our institution not only sets it apart from other medical universities, but it also at least partly fills the need for Hungarian language higher education.

The doctor-patient relationship can be influenced by many factors, and proper communication is a key aspect. This can of course be facilitated if the doctor and patient share the same mother tongue and perhaps similar cultural backgrounds, that have a positive effect on patient trust as well (Banerjee & Sanyal, 2012). Thus providing Hungarian language professionals in healthcare for the regions that have a predominance of Hungarian ethnics seem both logical and necessary.

Keeping in mind the specific of our region and institution, we aimed to determine the opinions of 4th year medical students – both Romanian and Hungarian language series – on education in our University, their learning habits and options, and future career choices. This should give us certain answers regarding the state of our medical education and perhaps the future of healthcare in Romania, by assessing career options amongst our students (including options on practicing medicine in their country or abroad, in their counties of origin, and working in academia). Comparing the answers of students from the Romanian and Hungarian language series can further identify relevant aspects of Hungarian language medical education in Romania.

2. Material and method

We developed a questionnaire consisting of a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The 21 questions were formulated so as to obtain information about basic demographics of the students, and their learning habits, future career choices and opinions on current medical education. The questionnaire was filled out by 123 students from the Romanian-language series and 127 from the Hungarian-language series.

The anonymous questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to fill out. The obtained data was statistically analyzed using MedCalc software (bvba, version 12.3.0, Mariakerke, Belgium): the chi square test, with a cut-off point of $p=0.05$.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic data

The two student groups were similar in terms of age and sex. In the Romanian series, 35.77% were from Mureș County and 21.95% came from north-eastern counties, while the great majority of Hungarian students were from the counties of Mureș, Harghita, Covasna and Satu-Mare (30.70%, 29.13%, 14.96% and 11.81% respectively).

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