Medical Education Research

'Learning to Describe Skin Lesions: Challenges and Suggestions'

Presenter: Zeynep Akkurt, MD

Background: Describing findings of skin disease on a skin examination constitute the first and basic step in diagnosing skin disease. These findings are expressed through standard, internationally approved terminology in dermatology. Learning to utilize terminology to describe skin lesions is challenging for medical students. The existing literature is lacking on teaching methods to improve this specific skill.

Objectives: To characterize challenges MS4 students participating in the elective dermatology rotation in the 2020-21 school year faced while learning how to describe skin lesions. To analyze recommendations made by these students to overcome the challenges. To compile a guideline of suggestions and tips for future students. To suggest improvements to dermatology teachers.

Methods: All students participating in the MS4 clinical dermatology rotation were given a lecture on describing lesions in dermatology on the first day of their rotation. They were offered resources for self-study of the topic and encouraged to practice describing lesions throughout their first week. At the end of the first week students were asked to reflect on their experience learning to practice describing lesions using the following question: "Please reflect on what you learned about describing lesions in dermatology. What were the challenges you faced and did you employ any techniques to learn and practice? What was the most effective way of learning for you? What could have been a better way? What suggestions would you make to future students and to me in learning/teaching this aspect of dermatology?" Answers were uploaded to Canvas. Qualitative thematic analysis of answers was undertaken. The author read and re-read the answers to identify text pertaining to domains of challenges and recommendations. Initial codes were identified under each category and quotes were grouped under the codes. After a final review of the codes, the themes were finalized. Quotes that were congruent with the overarching themes were identified.

Results: Twenty-two students' responses to the reflection question were analyzed. Challenges and suggestions were recorded. Common themes were identified. Common themes that were identified for challenges: Using correct terminology, difficult lesions, real-life cases being different than pictures, being fluent in the language of describing, lack of time with attending, lack of dermatology education. Common themes for recommendations were: Practicing through self-study, practicing in clinic, practice sessions with teacher.

Conclusions: Using the findings of this study we have compiled a guideline for students to use while learning to describe skin lesions. Based on the data we have, we emphasize that this is a skill that takes practice to perfect and will distribute the guideline early in the rotation for future students' reference. Teachers of dermatology should be aware of the challenges and suggestions, strive to do one-on-one teaching with students in clinics that includes giving effective feedback and plan sessions devoted to describing skin lesions.

References:
1- Cardili RN, Roselino AM. Elementary lesions in dermatological semiology: literature review. An Bras Dermatol 2016; 91: 629-33.
2- Blakely K, Bahrani B, Doiron P, Dahlke E. Early introduction of dermatology clinical skills in medical training. J Cut Med Surg 2020; 24: 47-54.