

Problem Based-Learning (PBL) Curriculum: Has it Fulfilled its Promise?

M-S. M. Ardawi:

Faculty of Medicine and King Abdulaziz University Hospital, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Background: Problem-based learning (PBL) represents a major complex and widespread change in educational practice within medical education: many medical schools worldwide have implemented PBL. However, its effect on the performance of its graduates is a subject of considerable debate.

Objectives: The main objectives of the current presentation is an attempt to define and explore the theoretical basis and historical background of PBL in medical education. Moreover, it will systematically review the evidence in the literature and argue about the advantages and limitations of PBL and the implications of its implementation in Saudi medical schools.

Discussion: It is argued that problems encountered in PBL practice usually stem from poor implementation of the PBL process. However, uncertainties about the efficacy of PBL create for exploring alternatives to PBL, including hybrid curriculum. Research in PBL should contribute towards a better understanding of why and how the concepts of PBL learning work or not and under what circumstances? Examples of studies are presented to illustrate these issues. Accordingly, curricular reform can be made in combination with existing methods and each medical school has to adopt a learning system based on its own culture, resources and environment; thus introducing modifications in existing system rather than a complete change is a wiser approach to medical curricular reform and development.

References: Schmidt HG, Vermeulen L, van der Molen HT. Long term effects of problem-based learning: a comparison of competencies acquired by graduates of a problem-based and conventional medical school. *Med Educ* 2006; 40:562-7. Colliver JA. Effectiveness of problem-based learning curriculum: Research and Theory. *ACAD Med* 2006; 75: 259-66.