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BRIDGING THE GAP: REFLECTIONS ON PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION IN MEDICAL EDUCATION THROUGH THE WORLD DIABETES DAY EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Public-private collaboration in healthcare helps improve medical education by exposing students to real clinical situations. Through this event, medical students from the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM) joined the exhibition, helping with patient education, teamwork and programs for the community. Groups of students joined endocrinologists, primary care specialists, dietitians, wound care experts and physiotherapists at five interactive booths to provide information on managing diabetes. Working in labs helped students better understand what they learn in class and communicate about difficult medical topics. At the same time, the event paid special attention to mentorship, making connections and working in teams, sharing what is important in treating patients and why a multidisciplinary approach helps. The simulation experience helped students understand both theory and practice about the mental effects of diabetes and how could react with more empathy toward each patient. This article points out that public-private collaboration in medical education can be transformative and suggests that more emphasis be placed on experiential learning. As medical education adjusts, universities and healthcare organizations must grow close so they can raise well-prepared, kind and flexible healthcare workers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Medical education has been limited to universities and teaching hospitals, but healthcare is more complex than these places. Since patients use both public and private healthcare services, teachers should prepare students to perform well in different clinical fields [1-2]. On November 16, 2024, at the World Diabetes Day Exhibition at Prince Court Medical Centre, students were able to experience private healthcare, meet seasoned experts and learn about diabetes management. Those involved included 16 third-year medical students from the Faculty of Medicine and Defence Health, directed by two preclinical lecturers and three clinical lecturers. The exhibition was congruent with this year's theme for World Diabetes Day which aimed to educate people on the public health challenges of diabetes, lower diabetes risk and open the door to proper, accessible, high-quality care for all those dealing with the condition [3-4].

Its goal was to teach students about diabetes care, foster teamwork among different healthcare professionals and open doors for new professional connexions through work with a company. Thanks to participating in diabetes education stations led by healthcare professionals, students put their theoretical insights into practise and learned more about treating patients as a team. Working together, medical students and allied healthcare professionals use a team approach to educating people about diabetes. Partnering on diabetes management gives future physicians firsthand knowledge and abilities that help

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them care for patients well and manage the disease efficiently. Since diabetes is a chronic condition, it greatly affects individuals, families and communities [5-6]. Not only did this event help students learn about diabetes management, but students also had the chance to talk directly with patients, turning concepts into practical skills. For most participants, the experience had a powerful effect on their learning, helped Unite preclinical and clinical studies and confirmed the positive results of public-private partnerships dedicated to creating caring and expert medical personnel. Students in this programme learned valuable clinical abilities, learned how to communicate well and gained a deeper understanding of diabetes.

2.0 THE EXPERIENCE: LEARNING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

The organisers made concerted efforts to ensure that World Diabetes Day was interactive, engaging for all participants, and rich in educational content. This programme emphasised getting students involved by preparing five themed stations where participants learned actively, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. All five stations of the event

2.1 Station 1: Optimizing Diabetes Care

This station aimed to enhance public knowledge about the key factors that must be addressed when one is living with diabetes mellitus. The main areas addressed were reducing blood sugar, lowering cholesterol levels, optimizing blood pressure, managing weight and smoking cessation. Through consultations and discussions, students assisted patients and the public in diabetes management, while being supervised by endocrinologists, lecturers and other allied medical staff. They found it much easier to present complex diabetes-related information in a simple and accessible manner, thanks to this experience. The activities provided students with hands-on opportunities to educate patients and the public about diabetes, while simultaneously enhancing their own understanding and practical experience in diabetes care [7-8].

2.2 Station 2: Healthy Eating

Under the supervision of dietitians, students explained meal planning to participants and taught them why nutrition matters for diabetes management. This activity reinforced practical dietary strategies and emphasized the importance of nutritional science in diabetes care [9-10]. Methods suggested included using portion control, eating foods low on the glycaemic index, learning about the food pyramid, counting calories simply and adding nutritional supplements. Visual cards listing types of food and beverages were

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given to the public to help them pick out and match their usual meals. The dietitians assisted in calculating the calories. By taking part in these discussions, participants were encouraged to manage their own diets and follow a healthy eating plan while monitoring their caloric intake, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Use of pictorial cards to reflect the food and beverages taken in each meal

2.3 Station 3: Active Lifestyle

This station highlighted the importance of cardiovascular and resistance exercise in diabetes care [11-12]. Participants were encouraged to cycle on a stationary bicycle, supervised by physiotherapists and students. As a result, they could learn how small physical efforts can significantly help people living with diabetes. Resistance training was also introduced to demonstrate its role in muscle glucose uptake and its long-term management. The students participated actively, and observed the importance of behavioural change, reinforcing the role of exercise education in diabetes management.

2.4 Station 4: Wound Care

Wound care nurses supervised the students as they learned and practised the proper way to care for diabetic foot wounds [13-14]. This activity emphasized the importance of early intervention in preventing diabetic foot ulcers. Recent advancements in diabetic wound care were discussed with participants to improve their understanding. Additionally, students had the opportunity to emphasize the significance of prevention and early intervention in diabetic foot care.

2.5 Station 5: Diabetes Complications

A simulated activity demonstrated the neurological impairments caused by diabetic neuropathy, helping participants understand the struggles patients face.. The weighted walking exercise allowed participants to experience the challenges of diabetic neuropathy firsthand. These simple yet impactful exercises made the realities of diabetes more tangible, not just for the public but for the students as well.

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Figure 3. Engaging with the participants

3.0 DISCUSSION

3.1 The Role of Public-Private Collaboration in medical education.

This event would not have been possible without the collaboration between NDUM and Prince Court Medical Centre. It highlighted the importance of such partnerships in medical education. Public-private collaborations, provided medical students with a bridge between classroom learning and real-world clinical practice, allowing them to refine their practical skills in patient education, teamwork, and interprofessional collaboration [15-16]. Engaging directly with endocrinologists, dietitians, and wound care specialists strengthened the students' understanding of multidisciplinary diabetes management. Direct interaction with patients and public participants enhanced students' empathy, communication skills, and ability to deliver compassionate, patient-centred care. Additionally, exposure to private healthcare professionals opened doors to mentorship, networking, and career development opportunities, reinforcing the importance of such collaboration beyond academia.

Many students expressed immense gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this event, which broadened their perspective on medical education. It was a refreshing change from conventional medical training, offering an innovative and interactive learning model. This experience contributed to their professional growth, building confidence, and professionalism as these are essential qualities for health care professionals. The success of this collaboration highlights the value of bridging academia with the private healthcare sector, fostering a well-rounded and patient centred approach to medical training.

3.2 Mentorship and Growth: A Personal Reflection

Assisting students as they grow, and change is a deeply fulfilling experience for a mentor [17-18]. At the start of the event, many were nervous and unsure how to interact with participants. However, with guidance from healthcare professionals and lecturers, they managed to adapt and performed well. By the end of the event, they were explaining medical concepts with confidence, responding to participants' queries effectively, and even improvising when needed. This experience was especially valuable for them as they were adapting from preclinical years to clinical years. It provided them with a realistic, patient-centred learning environment, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world practice. For some, it was their first time interacting with patients outside a public hospital setting, offering a new perspective and hands-on application of their knowledge. Their feedback reflected meaningful insight, as

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they engaged warmly with participants, raised awareness about diabetes, improved their communication skills, and experienced the different environment of a private hospital. As educators, guiding students through this collaborative and immersive learning approach is both meaningful and fulfilling. Mentorship supports personal growth and professional development by encouraging self-discovery, making it important for future healthcare professionals.

4.0. CONCLUSIONS

The World Diabetes Day Exhibition 2024 at Prince Court Medical Centre was not just an event, it was an impactful learning experience for everyone involved. It demonstrated how public-private collaboration can enrich medical education, enhancing students with the skills, exposure, and confidence needed to become holistic, patient-centred doctors. Evolving medical landscape requires integration of experiential learning with other professionals either in public or private institutions. Future initiatives should continue these partnerships, as it helps shaping future doctors to see different models of patient care, ensuring they receive the best possible exposure to the realities of clinical practice. By learning beyond the four walls of a classroom, students get invaluable hands-on experience in their journey to become a compassionate health care professional.

5.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

6.0 AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Abu Hassan, H. (Supervision)
Nordin, N. (Project administration)
Miskan, M. (Conceptualisation)
Ab Rahim, S. N. (Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing)
Ng, K. K. (Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing)
Shaharuddin, S. (Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing)

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