

Curricular need evaluation for students pursuing Masters in Hospital & Healthcare Management at an Indian University.

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Abstract: *The focus of the study is to understand the students' perception about the academic and professional factors associated with an existing post graduate degree programme in hospital & healthcare management of an Indian University. 157 students pursuing first year of post-graduation at an Indian university participated in the study. The methodology had a questionnaire along with personal interview by the worker. The content of the questionnaire & interview were based on assessing the students on their requirement in terms of education being imparted and their opinion in terms of skill set that needs to be developed for them to take on the future role of a healthcare manager/s. The results show the important factors that lead the candidate to select this course. The most favored factors associated with the programme emerged as subjects taught (91.7%), provision of pre-induction material (75.15%), assessment parameters to judge performance (85.90 %). The study also revealed the major area in which students felt that improvement is required so as to increase their employability that includes understanding of service mix (82.10 %), problem solving & decision making skills (77.7%), and also handling work pressure (53.5%) these factors emerged as key professional aspects related to healthcare service sector.*

Keywords: *Curriculum, healthcare, hospital, management, post-graduation.*

I. Introduction

The healthcare industry in India is the fastest growing industry. The growing demand for quality healthcare and the absence of matching delivery mechanisms pose a challenge and certainly a great opportunity in terms of the skilled workforce availability.

Several business schools, universities and teaching hospitals are offering degree, diploma and certificate courses in hospital and healthcare management. Nearly over 100 schools/ institutions are engaged in teaching healthcare management programmes. The key issue today is whether business schools have the relevant curriculum and delivery system to prepare future leaders for the dynamic changes [1]. There is a lack of good trained faculty, training material and work experience to standardize the training programmes.

Healthcare in India has various verticals and is offered through private & public providers. Many undergraduates and post graduate programmes taught thus have focus on these verticals that includes, hospitals, consultancies, health insurance, healthcare information technology, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, wellness, NGO's and Research & Development.

The role of a healthcare manager has received lot of importance in recent times, given the work profile, overall career advancement, remuneration and also the administrative challenges that this profession offers.

There is a sharp increase in number of candidates applying to the programmes in this niche area. However this increase nowhere reflects that industry is appreciating services of competent professionals, which in turn is an indication, that there still exists a gap in terms of demand and supply of such trained & skillful work force.

This study aims at recognizing the requirements from students view point, their perception about this course, their present knowledge level and their expectations from this programme for their future job prospects.

But the question here is does there exist uniformity in course pattern, teaching pedagogy, selection criteria of students, specializations offered etc.; when discussing about healthcare management education in India.

1.1 Purpose of the Study: The healthcare executives have tremendous effect on the readiness, approachability and quality of overall health services provided. The present variations taking place in the industry due to new innovations in the field of technology along with growth in population have significantly increased the demand for professional degree programmes in the field of healthcare management. As a result, competition in educating the workforce has intensified and will remain so to increase with new expansions.

As part of overall management development process, this study intends to recognize the skills significant for hospital administrators and to evaluate the current curriculum used for imparting required knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs). The researcher also aims to make an attempt to standardize a curriculum in this specialized area.

II. Literature Review

Despite the strong base of support for competency based education in the field of information technology, general management, medical & nursing education and to some extent in healthcare management, the number of studies exclusively on competency based healthcare management education in India are limited.

The present scenario with respect to education in relation to hospital and healthcare management has improved considerably in the last decade. But there still lies an obvious gap when the focus comes to skills teachable in the classroom and requirements of the candidates pursuing this course.

Competency was first popularized with a research on clusters of competencies as: "A capacity that exists in a person that leads to behavior that meets the job demands within parameters of organizational environment, and that in turn brings about desired results [2]."

There exists a considerable difference between competency, competence and competencies. **Competency** refers to a person-related concept that refers to the dimensions of behavior imbibed through education by competent performers. **Competence** is a work-related and result-oriented concept that refers to areas of work at which the person is competent. **Competencies** are often referred as combination of above two. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. Individuals need a wide range of competencies in order to face the complex challenges of today's world [3].

Much attention has been focused on integrating competency-based curricula into educational programs in healthcare management. Achieving the benefits of competency-based curricula requires substantial effort to identify competencies that are both specific and comprehensive, and that reflect consensus among faculty and stakeholders [4].

In another study on "Strengthening Human Resources practices in Healthcare in India, it is pointed out that; the primary criterion for selection of candidates should be merit and ability [5].

The Lancet Commissions Report on "Health professionals for a new century: transforming education to strengthen health systems in an independent world", also discusses about the key reforms that should be established to take into account the crucial factors governing professional health education. As the report intensely examines the quality, standard and delivery of post-secondary health education in medicine, nursing and public health, the suggestions and contentions have been incorporated in the field of healthcare management education while conducting this study [6].

III. Materials & Methods

3.1 Study Design & Settings: This study was conducted on 1st year students of MBA- (Hospital & Healthcare Management); a full time two year degree course, offered by a recognized Indian University.

This is a pilot study and methodology adopted for the study was exploratory as well as descriptive along with personal interview of the candidates.

3.2 Sampling Method: Since all the participants were legitimate health care management students, a convenience census sampling technique was adopted for the purpose of this study.

3.3 Sample Size: 157 students pursuing first year of post-graduation at an Indian university participated in the study.

3.4 Research Tool/s: A questionnaire was designed specifically for the purpose of the study and was administered among 157 participants, with major division in three sections and responses were obtained with the use of 5 point Likert Scale.

The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections: Section A- consisted of questions asking students valid reasons for joining this programme. Section B- consisted of questions on students' perception about this programme and their anticipated learning outcomes. Section C- had questions on various parameters that represented the scope of learning with respect to KSAs to be achieved.

3.5 Procedure: This methodology of administering the questionnaire yielded 100 % response with minimal doubt about comprehension of the contents of the questionnaire.

3.6 Data Analysis: The data was computerized and statistical analysis was done with SPSS version 16. for windows. Descriptive statistics was used to arrive at frequency distribution and valid percentage.

IV. Findings & Discussions

The Questionnaire survey along with personal interaction with the post-graduate students of MBA (Hospital & Healthcare Management) revealed, key factors associated with the programme. (Refer to table 1) The students also expressed the need of more experiential teaching & learning activities as part of curriculum. The survey on the students revealed the following:

- Before the commencement of programme with regular classes the candidates selected were provided with induction material by advance email dispatch, to acquaint themselves with important topics. A majority of 75.15 % felt that induction material was useful for further understanding and adequate topics got covered. However 24.8 % felt that induction material was insufficient.

The overall response on induction material suggests that it is required before the regular classes as it sets the foundation and helps the students get acclimatized with different subjects of the course. Although up gradation too is suggested to take care of the non- positive responses which will be suggested after completion of this PhD project.

- The student's profiles who apply for admission into this programme include graduates from all disciplines like maximum candidates are from medicine, alternative medicine, pharmacy, life sciences, allied health, after that there are commerce, nursing as well as engineering graduates seeking admission in this course. 61.7% stated that previous educational background will help; but 38.4 % disagreed that their previous educational background will be of any help in understanding of core subjects. These respondents were mainly non- medical graduates.

This indicates that the selection criteria can be modified where; medical education background is preferred over the others.

- 57.3% of students felt that medical graduates have a definite advantage over non- medical graduates pursuing this course. 42.70 % were of the opinion that it hardly matters as the course also includes general management subjects.

- 91.70 % agreed that the subjects covered under the curriculum, will help them in gaining professional insight, which they believe are highlights of this programme.

- 87.8 % said that joining such a course is beneficial whereas 12.2 % are unclear.

This course apparently fosters and trains the students for the role of future managers with all the essential competencies required for being a successful healthcare executive. Accordingly the response that there is need to acquire such competencies the candidates take up this course is established.

- 85.90 % strongly agreed that performance in examinations; summer internships and interview have impact on future job performance.

Performance of individuals separately during the entrance exam and throughout the course, is an important factor, as the future ability to perform, capacity to learn further and developing the professional competencies will all depend on how the candidate has been performing from the start. Obviously the student who scoring high and above average throughout have higher chances to achieve professional success. And this also serves as the basic criteria during placements.

To become an efficient, effective, knowledgeable and a competent hospital manager, the candidate needs general as well as specific managerial skills pertaining to the functioning of hospital & healthcare industry. The key professional aspects associated with the profession and scope of improvement was revealed through section C of the questionnaire. (Refer to Table 2)

When asked about the specific areas pertaining to the profile of a healthcare executive where students themselves feel urgent need of improvement revealed the following:

- 53.5 % said they need improvement in handling various work pressure related to this profession. 46.5 % said that they need very little improvement on this; these respondents are the graduates from medical background and therefore have work experience as medical officer.

- 66.8 % agreed that they required lot of improvement to develop service oriented bent of mind in contrast to 33.2 % who felt that they already possessed it with their prior work experience as medical officer and handling patients.

- Problem solving and decision making skills is another factor that is required very prominently in healthcare industry, to develop on this aspect, 77.7 % said they needed lot of improvement. Whereas 22.30% were satisfied with their present ability and there exists a chance of improvement.

- 82.1 % said that they need to improve understanding of business aspect and service mix of the industry.

- 66.8 % said that they required improving a lot on human resource skills that include public handling, conflict resolving, communication, team leading, working in synergy with workers of all classes and different background and 33.2 % felt that they can execute and handle above issues with minimal improvement.

The hospitals range from general to speciality, multi-speciality and also superspeciality. Not only hospitals but other verticals of healthcare industry also require proficient managerial professionals at multiple levels.

When working on the business aspects of this industry, the above mentioned knowledge, skills, and abilities forms the crux. And as per the analysis, it is evident that most of the students who have recently begun their course feel the need for improvement. This paves a way for including the courses, topics related to the above skills and the practical approach of its application should be made part of teaching pedagogy. Similar indications can be drawn from problem statement of “The Lancet Commissions” report where it clearly states, the problems are systemic: mismatch of competencies, poor teamwork, narrow technical focus and qualitative and quantitative imbalances in the professional labor market [4]. Further pertinent & useful factors are likely to emerge after the scope of this study is enlarged during further main study.

V. Figures And Tables

Table 1: Students Response on factors associated with the programme

Factors	Agree		Disagree	
Induction Material is useful	75.15%	(118)	24.80%	(39)
Previous Educational Background	61.70%	(97)	38.30%	60
Advantage to medical graduates over non-medical	57.30%	(90)	42.70%	(67)
Subjects covered will help in gaining professional insight	91.70%	(144)	8.30%	(13)
Joining this Programme will prove beneficial	87.80%	(138)	12.20%	(19)
Performance throughout the academic session has impact on Job	85.90%	(135)	14.10%	(22)

Table 2: Students Response on scope of improvement on professional aspects with learning outcomes of this programme

Professional aspects	Need Improvement		Do not need any Improvement	
Handling work pressure	53.50%	(84)	46.50%	(73)
Developing Service orientedness	66.80%	(105)	33.20%	(52)
Problem solving & Decision Making Skills	77.70%	(122)	22.30%	(35)
Understanding of Business aspect & Service Mix	82.10%	(129)	17.90%	(28)
Human Resource Skills	66.80%	(105)	33.20%	(52)

VI. Conclusion

This study highlights in brief the considerable factors that are of relevance for the job position of hospital/healthcare executive. Certain parameters which are part of syllabus should be paid more attention, and require to be given detailed and objective training both theoretically as well as practically. This study will also be significant for the institutes providing higher education in the field of healthcare administration in developing a curriculum focused on the core competencies required at the initial stages of a career as a healthcare manager.

A detailed further study which will encompass other stakeholders (includes: industry experts, recruiters, faculty members) will hopefully support the findings outlined from this pilot study. The worker is in the process of such an expanded main study on these important issues.

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