

PROBLEM BASED LEARNING IN THE MAASTRICHT MEDICAL CURRICULUM

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In response to certain disappointing effects of conventional medical education (see for instance: Gonella et al., 1970), the faculty of medicine of the University of Limburg in Maastricht applies an instructional method that is called problem-based learning (Barrows and Tamblyn, 1980). In this approach students work on problems of health care delivery and acquire basic and clinical knowledge relevant to those problems. It is supposed that by studying in this way students will better be able to make an appropriate use of their knowledge when confronted with health care needs in later practice. Two investigations testing this hypothesis were presented.

In one investigation, Boshuizen and Claessen (1981) compared groups of students of the Maastricht medical faculty with students from a more traditional medical faculty on a number of problem-solving tasks. Each subject was confronted with case histories of two patients suffering from pancreatitis and prostatitis. After processing each case history the subject was asked among other things to write down a differential diagnosis, to rate the information in terms of its importance to the problem, and to recall the information. Small but reliable differences were found in favor of the Maastricht medical students.

In another investigation Schmidt (1982) made an attempt directly to test the problem-based learning hypothesis. Small groups of subjects worked on a problem. Subsequently, they studied a text containing new information relevant to the problem. The experimental subjects were better in recognizing the information from the text and in using it in order to solve new problems than the control subjects, who only studied the text.

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