

Addressing the void of entrepreneurship development amongst medical students in the UK

This article was published in the following Dove Press journal:
Advances in Medical Education and Practice

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship and innovation are important skills doctors must be equipped with to face the economic crisis engulfing the NHS. The £30 billion funding gap the NHS will face by 2020 requires doctors who are able to face these upcoming financial and organizational difficulties. Frontline staff are uniquely placed to identify inefficiencies in the health care system and develop solutions to them, so changing the medical school curricula to provide entrepreneurship and innovation development will benefit the NHS. Students can opt into this on an optional basis. The NHS is starting to recognize the importance of developing entrepreneurship and innovation as it has already introduced the Clinical Entrepreneur Programme in 2015. Offering entrepreneurship teaching in medical schools will not only diversify the skills of future health care professionals, but will also empower them with the right mindset to tackle the problems facing the health care system and sustain the NHS.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, business, education

It is widely accepted that delivering health care in the 21st century requires the adoption of new innovations to improve the efficiency of health care delivery. In fact, it is a priority for the NHS identified in the Five Year Forward View and its successor document, Next Steps on the NHS Five Year Forward View by NHS England.¹ Future doctors will face increasing levels of economic and organizational difficulties, and we need to ensure they are equipped with the right knowledge and skills to face such challenges.

Increasingly, more doctors are searching for alternative career pathways. Twenty-five percent of doctors do not immediately take up specialist training posts after completing their foundation training, and a further 5% pursue other opportunities.² One of these opportunities is becoming a medical entrepreneur – a pathway that is becoming more popular amongst doctors as it provides an array of skills necessary to face the economic crisis encompassing the NHS.³ However, entrepreneurship does not play a role in the delivery of medical education in universities; this is despite the dire need for changes to be implemented to save the future of the NHS.

So, this begs the question: why is not there more entrepreneurship teaching in UK medical schools?

To solve some of the challenges faced by the NHS, we need health care professionals who are able “to design, develop, and implement patient-centred solutions to complex problems” (Niccum, 2017).⁴ Frontline staff are uniquely placed to identify gaps in the health care system and develop solutions, so changing

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the medical school curricula to provide entrepreneurship and innovation development will benefit the NHS.

The existing medical school curriculum already includes a range of transferrable skills such as the critical appraisal of evidence, effective communication, thorough interpretation and analysis of data and the ability to diagnose problems. These skills can be applied to entrepreneurial ventures. So, we can supplement the curriculum with further entrepreneurial skills by offering entrepreneurial online workshops, recognized official modules and intercalated qualifications which keen students can opt into if they are interested. These programs would incorporate both active learning and interdisciplinary teaching as this was highlighted as being effective in the literature (Niccum, 2017).⁴

The NHS is already starting to recognize the importance of developing entrepreneurship and innovation, and in 2015 introduced the Clinical Entrepreneur Programme.⁵ This program provides a platform for entrepreneurial doctors to network and work with like-minded individuals to develop solutions for the NHS. The effectiveness and exposure of this program could be enhanced if medical schools exposed students to the importance of entrepreneurship development at an earlier stage.

Nonetheless, there are challenges that need to be overcome in order to achieve the full benefits of entrepreneurial development in health care. Entrepreneurship emphasizes the importance of economic value, efficiency and measuring outcomes of performance; these teachings somewhat clash with the medical ethics of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice, on which medical practice is based.⁶ Practicing entrepreneurship should not interfere with the importance of practicing the medical ethics; thus,

we need to instill in entrepreneurial doctors the importance of upholding a high standard of medical practice whilst pursuing their entrepreneurial ventures.

Doctors have a unique insight into both patient and organizational needs, so they are best placed to identify problems and develop practical solutions to solve them. This is necessary to sustain the future of the NHS. Importantly, incorporation of entrepreneurship into medical school curricula will inspire medical students to develop their business skills which will be crucial in their future medical career.

Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report in this work.

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