

Need for a proper BLS curriculum: medical students and beyond

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Madam, first aid and basic life support (BLS) as the name implies refers to the immediate life-saving protocols designed to minimise the complications of injury until advance treatment is available. Due to unavailability of urgent medical aid to the victims, thousands of lives are lost every year as a result of both man-made and natural disasters. The 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, floods in Sindh and the recent factory fires in Karachi and Lahore are some examples.

The importance of BLS is acknowledged all over the world, and in many international medical universities of USA¹ and UAE² formal training in first aid management is a compulsory part of the undergraduate medical curriculum. Unfortunately in Pakistan, professional training of medical students is often neglected or not done effectively according to international standards. According to a survey conducted amongst students of Karachi, the knowledge regarding first aid management was indeed of better trained medical students but was not convincing enough as required by international guidelines.³

Studies have shown that professionally trained undergraduates are better able to manage medical emergencies during their practice.⁴ In Karachi, medical students of the Aga Khan University, Ziauddin Medical University and Dow University of Health Sciences are trained during their MBBS curriculum for emergency medical care. The students can then further transfer their skills to students of other universities, schools and to the public in general. As tertiary care hospitals are not many, and are often situated far from the site of accidents, and

ambulances are not as readily available either, basic life support provided by rescue teams or layperson can make a great contribution in reducing the number of casualties.⁵

Therefore, first aid classes and disaster management courses should be included from the first year of medical education and yearly refresher courses should be held to reinforce the knowledge and skills of the students. Inculcating the course within the curriculum with end-of-the-year examinations may also prove to be helpful as it ensures more sound learning.²

We believe that it is the need of the hour that both undergraduate medical students and people belonging to non-medical profession should be trained in providing adequate first aid. Hands-on workshops, seminars, drills and simulation learning must be encouraged for all people, irrespective of their profession and position. Even a single life saved by learning these basic techniques can go a long way!

References

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