ANALYSIS OF FORENSIC MEDICINE QUESTIONS IN THE UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL CURRICULUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA

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Forensic Medicine is a subject in the undergraduate medical curriculum in Sri Lanka. Essay and structured essay types of questions are used to assess the knowledge and understanding of the subject among students. Current literature on student assessment stresses the importance of promoting higher order thinking, such as analyzing and evaluating, rather than simple recall of facts. Hence this study was designed with a view to determining the level of cognitive processing required to answer the essay and structured essay type of questions in Forensic Medicine.

Essay and structured essay types of questions of the first four years of the MBBS programme from the year 2006 to 2012 were categorized by three academic staff members according to the Bloom’s taxonomy.

A majority (32.6%) of questions were assessing recall of existing knowledge while a significant number were of the comprehension (21.9%) and application (22.3%) types. The proportion of questions falling within the synthesis (8.2%) and analysis (for.7%) categories were significantly less while there was a moderate number (10.3%) of questions which required the student to evaluate a given situation. Observations made between the years revealed that there was a tendency for a decrease in the proportion of knowledge based, recall type questions from the first to the fourth year with an increase in the proportion of comprehension, application and synthesis type of questions.

Therefore, it maybe concluded that a majority of questions in Forensic medicine requires lower cognitive abilities. However, there is a tendency towards questions which require higher cognitive abilities with progression in to the later years of the medical course. It is hypothesized that poor English language competence of students resulting in inability to express complex phenomena, an increase in the number of students per intake resulting in a large number of scripts to correct, underestimating student capabilities and difficulties encountered by teachers in adapting to new educational trends may be responsible for this situation.