**Patient and student attitudes to clinical demonstrations – is it time we stopped ‘protecting’ our patients?**

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Introduction

This study aims to assess patient and student perceptions of clinical demonstrations on consented neurology inpatients as part of undergraduate teaching.

Methods

Weekly clinical demonstrations comprise history, examination and discussion of differentials, management and prognosis in the patient’s presence.

In this prospective study, anonymous questionnaires were distributed to patient and medical student participants between September 2013 and August 2015 and the data analysed.

Results

134/450 students and 64/70 patients responded. 83% of students found the sessions useful. However half of the students thought that the patient should leave before the discussion of differentials, management and prognosis. Conversely, 97% of patients were pleased that they stayed. 20 students expressed reservations about the patient’s presence in free comments; many thought it was ‘inappropriate’. 22 students were concerned about patient comfort, citing ‘trauma’ and ‘sensitivity’.

13 patients reported an increased understanding of their condition as a result of the session; 9 reported enjoyment or good treatment.

Conclusion

Although patients widely reported satisfaction, students expressed major reservations about patients’ presence for the discussion. Whilst our patients often face bleak circumstances, we postulate the students’ negative feedback reflects transference, with students projecting their own discomfort onto the patient and teacher. Medical school curricula increasingly teach various aspects of being a doctor in separate artificial environments. Real patient-centred experience should be the keystone of preparing our students for clinical practice. In the age of information, patient-doctor partnerships and shared decision making, should we really shield our patients from our thoughts – and the truth?