Making the case for a clinical pharmacology skills program during the preclinical years: A proposal

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The past decade has witnessed a great push towards restructuring of medical students' training in Clinical Pharmacology (1, 2). This has been triggered, at least in part, by an increase in medication errors involving junior doctors as well as evidence that junior doctors feel unprepared for the responsibility. However, most proposed interventions target either postgraduate students or students undertaking their clinical clerkships. Increasing the load of clinical pharmacology in an already cluttered clerkship schedule in addition to the vast number of available drugs, new treatment approaches and complex treatment regimens limit the successful training of medical students and in turn their future therapeutic skills. Therefore a structured and gradual approach to training is warranted.

Very little attention has been paid to how the preclinical years can ease the learning of clinical pharmacology eventually contributing to student’s better feelings of confidence and competence during the clinical years. The authors would like to discuss a proposal, which suggests the introduction of a Clinical Pharmacology Skills Program to run parallel to the basic pharmacology course where students can practice major core therapeutic skills from the beginning of medical school. The proposed skills, expected outcomes, stratification of core competences by year, methods of delivery and assessment as well as limitations will be discussed.

