
Accreditation of medical education: Perspectives of stakeholders

Marivic A. Villamor, MD, MHPEd, PhD and Alfaretta Luisa T. Reyes, MD

Abstract

Introduction This study aimed to describe the perspectives of stakeholders on the impact of the accreditation process on the implementation of the medical curriculum. Furthermore, the study attempted to explore the quality of the impact of accreditation on the implementation of the curriculum.

Methods Survey questionnaires were administered to 140 faculty staff, 100 students and 50 graduates. The questionnaires were developed based on the self-survey instrument of the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) covering five areas observed by the respondents: curriculum and instruction, faculty, students, resources and research. Review of PAASCU reports from 2002 to 2013 and survey questionnaires were likewise conducted.

Results The faculty, students and graduates rated as "very good" the areas of curriculum, instruction, student profile, and student performance, except "application of appropriate teaching-learning strategies" which the students gave a "good" rating. The students rated the resource driven areas (library, learning environment, research capability, research output) higher than the faculty. The respondents' self-survey ratings were consistently higher than the PAASCU ratings across four years evaluated.

Conclusion The respondents showed strong awareness of the benefits of accreditation on the faculty, students, curriculum and instruction. Resource-driven areas like research, library and learning environment and faculty benefits were deemed short of the expected excellent standard.

Accreditation serves as a tool to ensure quality in education. In the Philippines, medical schools'

interest in accreditation started only recently. This endeavor among medical schools to seek external evaluation of the implementation of the medical curricula was seen among the 41 Philippine medical schools. Eleven schools have thus far been granted accreditation, three are candidates and eight are in the process of application. Accreditation is voluntary and conducted by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), one of several accrediting bodies in the country. Accreditation, as defined by the PAASCU, is a concept based on self-regulation which focuses on evaluation and the continuing improvement of educational quality. Accreditation is both a process and a status. It is the process of reviewing colleges,

Correspondence:

Marivic A. Villamor, MD, MHPEd, PhD, College of Medicine, University of the East Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center Inc., 64 Aurora Boulevard, Barangay Doña Imelda, Quezon City 1113; E-mail: silvmav_99@yahoo.com; Telephone: 09178350425

Presented in the Free Communication Category, 13th Asia Pacific Medical Education Conference (APMEC), January 13-17, 2016, National University of Singapore, Singapore.

universities, institutions and programs to judge their educational quality.¹ Furthermore, it is seen as a process by which institutions or programs continuously upgrade their educational quality and services through self-evaluation and the judgment of peers. In the end, a specific status is granted to an educational institution or program which meets commonly accepted standards of quality or excellence.²

The accreditation process provides an external perspective of the success of the implementation of a curriculum. It allows medical schools to monitor and evaluate the processes involved in education in the context of their own perceived standards. Medical education accreditation processes can encourage institutional improvement and promote appropriate learning environments.³

The survey forms developed by PAASCU identify principles and practices which are found in excellent institutions. The statements in the survey forms are more qualitative rather than quantitative. The criteria and survey instruments are merely tools to help the school measure educational quality. They are intended to serve as a guide for institutions as they strive for excellence. The standards reflect a realistic appraisal of the school's resources and their efficient utilization to help the institution achieve its goals.²

PAASCU judges an institution not by comparison with other institutions but primarily by the degree to which each institution's own avowed purposes are matched by actual practice in the various areas being evaluated. Thus, a school is judged on the basis of the "total pattern" it presents. For basic medical education programs, the areas evaluated are: faculty, curriculum and instruction, clinical training/service facilities, research, student, library, administration, and physical plant and other resources.⁴

One of 11 schools accredited by PAASCU is the UERMMMCI College of Medicine, a private, non-sectarian university. The College of Medicine first applied for voluntary accreditation in 2003 and subsequently received level 1 accreditation status. In 2004, level 2 accreditation status was conferred. Five years later in 2009, the school was granted level 3 accreditation status and consequently reaccredited the same level in 2012. In 2013, the College of Medicine has the distinction of being the first private medical school to achieve level 4 accreditation status.

Having obtained the highest level of accreditation it is expected that the evaluation process elevated the

quality of medical education. A decade of accreditation should manifest as impact on the components of medical education. The primary beneficiary of the accreditation process is the student population trained in a learning environment of excellent quality. Van Zanten, Durante and Pijano found that Mexican and Filipino students who enrolled in accredited medical schools had better outcomes in the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) than those who came from non-accredited schools.⁵ Van Zanten investigated the performance of foreign graduates in the USMLE based on the accreditation of the medical education programs and reported similar findings.⁶

While achievement of learning outcomes is the ultimate goal of accreditation, other measures can be used to validate the impact of the accreditation on the quality of education received by the students. The UERMMMCI has experienced a decade of accreditation undertaking and it is imperative that a study be conducted to determine whether or not the accreditation process has accomplished its goal: the improvement of medical education. Thus, the study aimed to describe the extent to which accreditation has influenced the quality of teaching in five areas that PAASCU evaluates: faculty, student, curriculum and instruction, resources and research. Specifically, the study determined the stakeholders' perspectives of the impact of the accreditation process on the aforementioned areas.

Methods

A survey was conducted to describe the perspectives of stakeholders on the contribution of the accreditation process on the implementation of the medical curriculum. The participants were selected based on their length of affiliation with the institution. Faculty who had been with the College of Medicine less than five years were excluded. The students who experienced the accreditation process longest were invited to join the survey. Thus, a sample from the fourth year and graduates having their postgraduate internship in the hospital were invited to participate. Survey questionnaires were distributed to 140 faculty staff, 100 students and 50 graduates. The survey was conducted from July to August 2015. Consent from the respondents was solicited prior to the administration of the questionnaires. PAASCU reports from 2002 to 2013 were reviewed.

The questionnaires were developed based on the self-survey instrument of the PAASCU. Five areas that could be observed by the stakeholders were included: curriculum and instruction, faculty, student, resources and research. The respondents were likewise surveyed on their perceptions on the quality of resources like learning environment, library and research. A review of the reports submitted to the accrediting body was likewise conducted. This was carried out to assess the value of the reports of the committees involved in the accreditation process.

Results

One hundred five (75.0%) faculty responded to the survey while 62 (68.9%) fourth year students and 27 (54%) graduates responded to the survey questionnaire.

As seen in Table 1 the faculty and students rated highly the areas of curriculum, instruction, student profile, and student performance. However, a contrast is observed as far as instruction is concerned. While the faculty rated instruction highly (very good), 69.6% of students rated "application of appropriate teaching-learning strategies" as good. The students and faculty agreed in terms of the quality and academic performance of the students. Specifically, both faculty and students find the selection of applicants highly acceptable. Similarly, majority of the respondents manifested approval of the improved method of promoting students to the next year level. More than 50% of the faculty and students indicated that accreditation had influenced improvement of the graduates' performance in the Physician Licensure Examination.

Table 1. Perceptions of stakeholders on influence of accreditation on curriculum implementation.

Area	Faculty and department heads (n=107)	Students (n=87)
Curriculum		
Regular evaluation of the implementation of curriculum	Very good (39.2%)	
Monitoring of implementation of curriculum	Very good (40.5%)	
Feedback of evaluation results to stakeholders	Very good (39.2%)	
Student participation in curriculum evaluation		Very good (45.7%)
Instruction		
Application of appropriate teaching-learning strategies	Very good (48.1%)	Good (69.6%)
Updating of teaching resources	Very good (41.8%)	Very good (45.7%)
Use of multiple assessment methods	Very good (44.3%)	Very good (43.5%)
Availability of faculty for consultation		Very good (41.3%)
Student profile		
Improved selection process	Very good (50.6%)	Very good (43.5%)
Admission of students of quality academic preparation	Very good (49.4%)	
Student performance		
Improved promotion process	Very good (48.1%)	Very good (47.83%)
Higher board examination performance	Very good (51.9%)	Very good (54.4%)

The study revealed divergent perceptions of the faculty and students on the significance of accreditation on resources, as seen in Table 2. Generally, the students were highly satisfied with all resources-driven areas such as library, learning environment and research. This was not observed in the appraisal by the faculty who gave a lower rating for both learning environment and research capability. For the faculty, the clinical and laboratory materials and space were still inadequate to provide an environment conducive to learning. The faculty rated statements on research capability, including "advancement of faculty proficiency in research" and "accessibility of resources for research

implementation," as good compared with the students' "very good."

The respondents had a high appreciation of the accreditation's influence in the enhancement of the library holdings. Accreditation recognized the contribution of library collections to the advancement of curriculum implementation. As seen in Figure 1, across the four years surveyed, two areas received consistently high ratings: faculty, and curriculum and instruction. The library was observed to consistently have the lowest ratings compared to the other areas in the four years surveyed. The self-survey ratings were consistently higher than those given by the accreditation teams that visited the school.

Table 2. Perceptions of stakeholders on influence of accreditation on the quality of resources.

Area	Faculty and department heads (n=107)	Students (n=87)
Library resource		
Enhancement of library collections	Very good (39.2%)	Very good (30.4%)
Adequate utilization of allocated funds for library acquisition	Good (36.7%)	
Adequacy of library space	Good (44.3%)	Very good (32.6%)
Learning environment		
Adequacy of space for laboratory procedures	Good (40.5%)	Very good (30.4%)
Adequacy of updated materials for laboratory procedures	Good (44.3%)	Very good (36.9%)
Sufficiency of materials for clinical skills acquisition	Good (36.7%)	Very good (41.3%)
Conducive space for lecture presentation	Good (35.4%)	Very good (47.8%)
Research capability		
Advancement of faculty proficiency in research	Good (48.1%)	
Accessible resource for research implementation	Good (45.6%)	Very good (34.8%)
Availability of avenue to present research output		Very good (39.1%)
Research output		
Increased number of completed research work	Good (32.9%)	
Increased number of published research reports	Good (40.5%)	

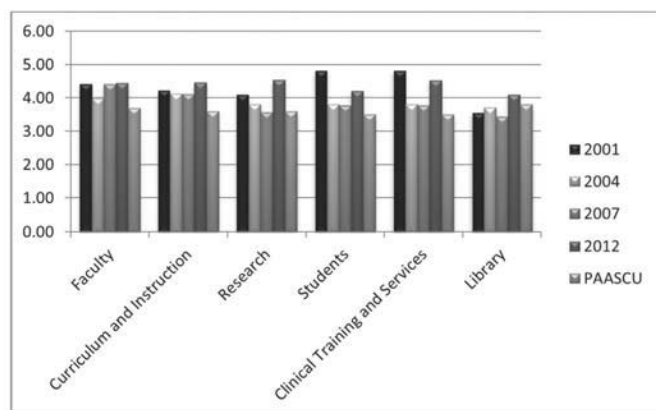


Figure 1. PAASCU self-survey ratings, 2001 - 2012.

Discussion

One of the goals of accreditation is the self-evaluation of the quality of the implementation of a program. The feedback of the stakeholders provides valuable information on how well the program is conducted. Secondly, in accreditation, the worth of the program is not prescriptive as the process allows the institution to determine the standards against which the program's value is measured.

In the Philippines, a measurable outcome of a medical institution's success is achievement of graduates in the Physician Licensure Examination. As such, accreditation has incorporated this criterion as a gauge of the quality of the curricular implementation. The UERMMMCI graduates' performance in the Physician Licensure Examination has been consistently higher than the national passing average, offering an indirect outcome measure of the impact of accreditation. However, performance in the licensure examination is not the sole indicator of the outcome of accreditation. As recommended by van Zanten, other measures of outcome need to be established as evidence.⁵ Conversely, one can argue that successful implementation of the medical curriculum depends on a range of factors such as educational culture, leadership, student and faculty characteristics. Based on this argument, the current study was conducted to specifically investigate the perceived impact of accreditation among those who directly benefit from the undertaking.

The respondents representing the faculty, students and alumni expressed different perceptions on the

worth of accreditation. The respondents' appraisal of the quality of the areas surveyed during the PAASCU accreditation was substantiated by qualitative analysis of the comments and recommendations derived from the PAASCU survey reports.

Successful implementation of a curriculum requires a well-planned instructional design, regular monitoring and evaluation, well selected-students, prudent student promotion and excellent performance of graduates in the licensure examination. The study findings have shown that the faculty, students and alumni similarly affirmed that accreditation has influenced the quality of curriculum implementation. The only area where a dissimilar opinion was observed was in the lower rating by the students on the application of teaching-learning strategies. This perception can be accounted for by the innate nature of this generation of students who are more adept at digital technology compared to most of their teachers.

An agreement of the students and faculty in terms of the quality and academic performance of the students was likewise noted. Such perspective can be related to the more judicious selection process practiced by the medical school as seen in more stringent requirements as higher National Medical Admissions Test (NMAT) percentile score, General Weighted Average (GWA) and interviews. Student performance, correspondingly perceived favorably by the respondents, could be attributed to the improved promotion process and the graduates' exemplary performance in the Physician Licensure Examination. The commendable rating on curriculum and instruction has proven that the efforts of the College of Medicine to regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of the course goals have paid off. The students and faculty are the best evaluators of how well the program is being run and their responses provided evidence to such achievement. Corollary to this, curriculum implementation hinges on the capability of the institution to provide the physical and manpower resources to support the needs of both students and faculty. It could be gleaned from the data that these areas were measured to be of average standard. It could be surmised that the above average quality on curriculum could be elevated to excellent once the stakeholders agree that resources are par with their expectations.

All of these are observations emanating from the stakeholders' perspectives and opinions which can be influenced by their own standards and values. The consistency of the information was established through review of the reports by the accrediting body which showed that most of the respondents' views on the influences of accreditation were verified by the survey reports. The PAASCU as an independent body has recognized the faculty and the curriculum as strong points of the College. As mentioned in the report, the medical faculty represents a wide range of specialization to provide the expertise in both basic and clinical sciences. The expertise of the faculty is an essential resource from which the students can gain knowledge, skills and experiences.

The reports have identified areas that need further improvement. These areas include library and research which are fundamental in enhancing the learning of the students. The adequacy and quality of the library holdings is a basic condition to maximize learning. The evolving topography of education mandates that information must be made available to learners and faculty. Such information, whether in print or digital format, needs to be accessible to faculty and students. This has been emphasized by Rankin and Sayre who stated that the changing milieu of continuing education emphasizes bringing information to the practitioner and teaching to the point of need.⁹ At the forefront of this development in the provision of information is the library.

Much has been mentioned on the area on research. Research in the academe is an essential component of medical education.¹⁰ Furthermore, the authors stated that research experience is invaluable to the physician's evidence-based practice as it imparts skills such as literature search, collecting, and analyzing data and critical appraisal of evidence.¹⁰ There is indeed value to research. However, the faculty, students and the PAASCU accreditors noted some deficiencies in the capability and output of the College as far as the area is concerned. The research output has not reached a high level of standard despite the regular capacity building and availability of funds to support faculty and student researches. These observations have been attributed to several factors as work priorities, time management and interest in the field.

In summary, standards set during accreditation have been the foundation improving medical

education. The stakeholders have recognized the import of self-evaluation and external appraisal particularly in areas that matter to them.

Accreditation is a resource-intensive endeavor entailing long hours of gathering and reviewing evidence, preparing for visits and implementing the evaluators' recommendations. Despite this, the study has shown that faculty and students are of the same mind that accreditation inspires schools to continuously improve on the quality of medical education. The feedback of the stakeholders can provide valuable information on how well the program is conducted. Secondly, worth of the program is not prescriptive in accreditation as the process allows the institution to determine the standards against which the program's value is measured.

Medical schools that submit to accreditation are of a mindset to improve the quality of education and consequently expect to gain from accreditation that will translate into beneficial outcomes for the stakeholders. In the final analysis, outcomes of accreditation are valued differently by stakeholders in the context of their own vision and perspective.

The faculty, students and graduates possess indispensable perceptions of accreditation as they are the immediate beneficiaries of changes spurred by the process. The respondents, regardless of their role in the academe, have revealed strong awareness of the benefits of accreditation on the faculty, students and curriculum and instruction. Resource-driven areas like research, library and learning environment and faculty benefits were deemed short of the expected excellent standard.

References

1. Accreditation, c. f. The Value of Accreditation 2010.
2. PAASCU. Philippines 2015. Retrieved from http://paascu.org.ph/home2012/?page_id=55.
3. van Zanten M, Norcini J, Boulet J, Simon F. Overview of accreditation of under-graduate medical education programmes worldwide. *Medical Education* 2008 Sept; 42(9): 930-7. DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2923.2008.03092.x.
4. PAASCU 2006 Primer. Retrieved from <http://www.dlsu.edu.ph/offices/iaa/paascu/default.asp#standards>.
5. van Zanten M, McKinley D, Durante M, Pijano CV. Medical education accreditation in Mexico and the Philippines: Impact on student outcomes. *Medical Education* 2012 Jun; 46(6): 586-92. DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2923.2011.04212.x.
6. van Zanten M. The association between medical education accreditation and the ex-amination performance of internationally educated physicians seeking certification in the United States. *Perspectives in Medical Education* 2015 Jun; 4(3): 142-5. DOI: DOI 10.1007/s40037-015-0183-y.

7. PAASCU Resurvey Report. UERMMMCI. 2010.
8. PAASCU Resurvey Report. UERMMMCI. 2007.
9. Rankin JA, Sayre JW. The Educational role of health sciences librarians. *Library Trends* 1993; 42(1): 45-61. Available from: https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/7886/librarytrendsv42i1e_opt.pdf?sequence=1.
10. Giri PA, Bangal VB, Phalke DB. Knowledge, attitude and practices towards medical research amongst the postgraduate students of Pravara Institute of Medical Sciences University of Central India. *J Family Med Prim Care* 2014 Jan-Mar; 3(1): 22-4. DOI: 10.4103/2249-4863.130263.