

Exploring Communication Approaches in Medication Consultations for Generation Z: a Cross-Sectional Descriptive Study of Two-Way and One-Way Methods

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Abstract

Background: In the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare communication, medical staff—primarily from Generations X and Y—traditionally employ two-way communication. This approach fosters active engagement and shared decision-making in student-centered teaching. However, aligning this well-established method with the preferences of Generation Z remains unexplored. This study delves into these preferences, specifically comparing traditional two-way communication with modern, digital platform-based one-way methods.

Methods: Through a cross-sectional study conducted among externs and interns at Surin Hospital, Thailand, we examined communication preferences using a 1-5 rating scale. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data, providing insights into the evolving communication landscape.

Results: Among the 67 interns and externs, with an impressive 80.6% response rate, preferences leaned toward hybrid consultation models. While two-way consultations received an average score of 3.2 (SD 0.88)—indicating moderate preference—respondents (63%) highly valued its educational benefits. Interestingly, 50% reported experiencing anxiety and insomnia before consultations, suggesting potential drawbacks. A key finding emerged, with 81.5% favoring a shift toward digital one-way communication for non-urgent cases. Moreover, nearly all participants expressed a preference for a three-level triage system, utilizing both methods: one-way for non-urgent, two-way for urgent, and two-way for emergency cases.

Discussion and Conclusion: This study underscores the need for tailored communication approaches in medication consultations for Generation Z medical trainees. Integrating digital platforms and offering a hybrid model can enhance communication effectiveness and adapt to the preferences of this emerging generation.

Keywords: Generation gap, Communication, Consultation, Medical Education

Introduction

In the fast-paced world of healthcare, the backbone of our workforce consists mainly of Generation X and Y professionals, commonly known as Millennials. These seasoned medical

experts prioritize robust two-way communication within the workplace (Smith *et al.*, 2023). Their approach goes beyond mere procedure; it serves as a foundation for building strong staff-student relationships and understanding the diverse concerns within the medical community (Jones *et al.*, 2023). This communication style is integral to medical education, fostering active engagement, collaborative decision-making, and a student-centered teaching approach (Tzenios *et al.*, 2022). The resonance between these

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professionals and their generational peers creates a vital channel for knowledge exchange and a supportive learning environment (Robert *et al.*, 2023).

In the ever-evolving medical landscape, a new generation—Generation Z—has emerged. These digital natives, shaped by connectivity and distinct expectations, bring fresh perspectives to communication (Johnson *et al.*, 2023). As they step into the medical profession, their interaction styles may diverge from those of their predecessors. This study embarks on a nuanced exploration, aiming to scrutinize how well-established communication practices of Generation X and Y align with the distinctive preferences of Generation Z, especially in the context of medication consultations. As we delve into subsequent sections, we focus on the communication preferences within the medical consultation providers, with reference to the evolving landscape shaped by Generation Z's unique outlook.

Methodology

Study Design and Participants

In this cross-sectional investigation, we explore consultation style preferences, specifically juxtaposing traditional two-way communication with the innovative one-way approach. The study targets externs and interns from the academic year 2023, individuals actively acquiring practical experience in the medical environment of Surin Hospital, Thailand.

Our research methodology incorporated a singular assessment, offering a snapshot of preferences within this distinct demographic. Ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Surin Hospital was obtained for the study protocol, encompassing the questionnaire and procedures. This ensures strict adherence to ethical standards and maintains participant confidentiality.

Outcomes

The primary outcome of this study focuses on describing the communication preferences of the emerging generation within the medical

field. Additionally, the study considers the distress associated with the need to consult medical professionals and the benefits related to medical education as secondary endpoints. All these aspects will be assessed using a rating scale.

Definition

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are the cohort of people born approximately between 1981 and 1996. Generation Z, also known as Gen Z or Zoomers, refers to the cohort of people born approximately between 1997 and 2012. In the Thai context, externs are sixth-year medical students. A sixth-year medical student born in 1999 would be approximately 24 years old. Interns are recent medical school graduates who are in their first year of residency. An intern born in 1998 would be approximately 25 years old.

Assessment, Data Collection, and Descriptive Statistics Analysis

In our study, participants were tasked with rating their communication preferences. These ratings were based on personal opinions and individual experiences, making the assessment inherently subjective. Using a 5-point scale, participants expressed their preferences, where a rating of 1 indicated the least preference, while a rating of 5 signified the highest preference.

We collected data from all interns and externs during the recent academic year. To ensure consistency and comparability, standardized rating scales were employed for all assessments. Descriptive statistics were then applied to process the gathered data, providing a comprehensive overview of participants' communication preferences. Metrics such as mean scores and standard deviations offered insights into the central tendencies and variability within the study's communication dynamics.

Results

In the academic year 2023, Surin Hospital enlisted 67 externs and interns as participants

in our study, yielding a robust response from 54 individuals, reflecting an impressive response rate of 86.6%. Notably, 26 respondents were externs (46.6%), while 28 were interns (53.4%).

Traditional Two-Way Consultations: A Quantitative Insight

The average preference score for traditional two-way consultations was 3.2, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.86, indicating a moderate preference. This score quantifies participants' inclination toward this communication method. Approximately 60.3%

of respondents found the traditional two-way consultation method educationally effective, with an average benefit rating of 3.0 (SD 0.9). Interestingly, despite its perceived effectiveness, 51.7% of participants reported experiencing anxiety and insomnia before engaging in such consultations. Additionally, the average distress associated with the need to consult medical professionals was 3.4 (SD 0.93), indicating moderate distress (as figure 1). It's worth noting that 93.1% of respondents attributed this distress not to system inefficiencies, but rather to individual factors related to the recipients of the consultations.

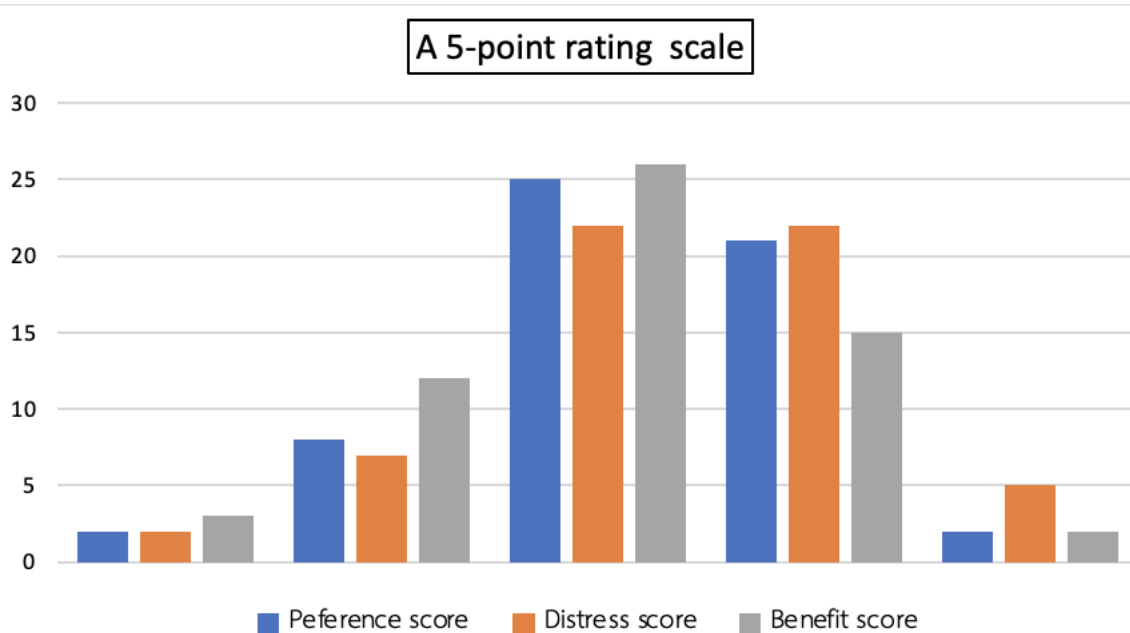


Figure 1: Rating scale of communication preferences (preference score), the distress associated with consultation (distress score) and the benefits related to medical education (benefit score)

A Call for Hybrid Models

Our research reveals intriguing insights into the communication dynamics within the medical field. Among the participants, 77.6% perceived the consultation process as genuinely two-way. However, there's a noticeable inclination toward transitioning to a modern, digital platform-based one-way communication method. Interestingly, almost unanimously, participants expressed a preference for a hybrid consultation model. This model would be structured around a three-level triage system. One-Way Communication for non-urgent cases and Two-Way Communication for urgent or emergency situations.

These findings underscore the communication preferences of Generation Z externs and interns. They emphasize the necessity for tailored communication strategies in medical consultations. In summary, our results unveil a nuanced landscape, revealing a desire for a hybrid model and a discernible shift towards modern, digital communication platforms.

Discussion

The study sheds light on communication dynamics within the medical field, specifically among Generation Z externs and interns. The average score of 3.2 suggests a preference for

traditional two-way consultations, indicating a reliance on established communication practices. Interestingly, despite this preference, a notable portion expressed interest in transitioning to a modern, digital platform-based one-way communication method—a trend observed among Generation Z nurses as well (Saenung *et al.*, 2020; Smith-Trudeau *et al.*, 2016), underscoring the need to integrate technology into real-life practice.

The coexistence of a perceived effectiveness of traditional consultations and a desire for digital innovation raises intriguing questions about the evolving expectations of medical professionals in training. The reported educational effectiveness (63%) reflects the success of the current communication paradigm, emphasizing active engagement and shared decision-making. However, the simultaneous acknowledgment of anxiety and insomnia by 50% of respondents before consultations suggests a potential downside to the existing model, prompting further exploration.

The study also reveals a nuanced preference among Generation Z for a hybrid consultation model connected to a three-level triage system (Koca *et al.*, 2023). Their openness to using both one-way and two-way communication, depending on the urgency of medical cases, demonstrates a practical approach. Recognizing this preference is crucial for shaping future communication strategies that cater to the specific needs of emerging medical professionals. This finding aligns with earlier research suggesting that understanding and adapting to Generation Z's communication needs can enhance the effectiveness of medical training, preparing future healthcare professionals for the changing landscape of healthcare delivery (Alhur *et al.*, 2023).

The study concludes with a compelling call to action, highlighting the imperative for the medical community to acknowledge and adapt to the communication preferences of younger generations. The suggested integration of digital platforms, irrespective of communication style, emerges as a strategic initiative to address the global concern of bridging the generation gap (Chicca *et al.*, 2018; Rillera *et*

al., 2024). This forward-looking approach aligns seamlessly with the broader objective of improving communication in medical consultations, ensuring a smooth transition into the continually evolving landscape of medical education.

In summary, the significance of this study lies in its exploration of communication preferences within the medical field, particularly among the emerging generation of healthcare professionals. By understanding how these professionals prefer to interact, we can tailor training and collaboration strategies to enhance healthcare practices. Additionally, the study sheds light on the emotional impact of consultations, balancing educational effectiveness with participants' well-being. As technology evolves, these insights become crucial for optimizing healthcare interactions and fostering meaningful communication.

Limitations

The study's sample size of 54 respondents, while yielding valuable insights, may not fully represent the diverse perspectives within the Generation Z medical trainee population. Generalizing the findings to a broader context should be done cautiously. Further, conducting the study exclusively at Surin Hospital limits the generalizability of the results to other medical settings. The unique environment and characteristics of Surin Hospital may influence participant preferences differently than in other institutions.

Recommendations

Future studies should encompass multiple healthcare institutions to enhance the generalizability of findings. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of communication preferences across different medical environments. Conducting longitudinal studies can capture evolving preferences over time and offer a more dynamic perspective. This approach will help identify trends and changes in communication preferences as Generation Z medical trainees progress through their training.

Implementation of Interventions

Building on the hybrid model recommendation, implementing and evaluating interventions that address the reported drawbacks of traditional consultations is essential. This could involve incorporating stress-reducing measures or providing additional support to alleviate pre-consultation anxiety. Recognizing the interest in digital platform-based communication, institutions should stay abreast of technological advancements. Regular update of communication methods to align with emerging technologies will ensure that the medical education system remains relevant and engaging.

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Conclusion

In the sphere of medical consultation, Recognizing and adapting to the communication preferences of younger generations, such as Generation Z externs and interns, is essential in medical consultations. Integrating digital platforms into the consultation process, regardless of the communication style, is key to effectively engaging with this demographic. This approach will help bridge the generation gap and improve communication during consultations.

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