

The Core Curriculum with Options (or Special Study Modules)

This is an answer to the problem of information overload. A curriculum cannot include all the possible knowledge, skills, and attitudes of a subject, there is never enough time.

A core curriculum of essentials is identified, ideally by a combination of stakeholders (in medicine, this could include clinicians, medical teachers, those with a research interest, students, government, and patients). Space is left in the timetable to also study in more depth one or more areas. These topics could be part of the core curriculum, or they could be completely unrelated.

Reference to this new way of thinking about the curriculum can be found in the GMC's document "Tomorrow's Doctors: Recommendations on Undergraduate Medical Education" (1993).

However, the philosophy behind a core curriculum is not only a way of cutting out "less important" study areas. There are 7 principles which have been identified to support this approach (the 6 C's):

Certification

The core curriculum is clearly defined, and mastery of these knowledge, skills, and attitudes results in a certificate of achievement that is recognised by outside agencies

Capability

The core curriculum links also to the concept of competencies. It provides the answer to the question "What should someone completing this course be capable of?"

Comprehensiveness

A core curriculum is not negotiable - it has to cover the defined essentials.

Consistency

Wherever a core curriculum is in place, it can be expected to cover the same content.

Constructivism

"Knowledge builds on knowledge". The core curriculum, because it is co-ordinated, allows for a coherent approach to creating knowledge, skills and attitudes. What was learned in year 1 will be built on in year 2, and provides the foundation for the learning of year 3, and so on.

Choice

The uniformity of the core curriculum could seem to limit choice - and this is the reason for the optional modules. The GMC recommended that the core should not occupy more than 2/3 of the timetable.

Reference:

AMEE Education Guide No. 5

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RM Harden and M Davis (1995)