EDITORIAL ARTICLE

Social Accountability of Medical Schools in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Overcoming the Challenges

Mohamed Elhassan Abdalla

Departments of Medical Education, Rheumatology, School of Medicine-University of Limerick, Ireland.

Correspondence to *Mohamed Elhassan Abdalla, MD, Department of Medical Education, School of Medicine-University of Limerick, Ireland.*
E-mail: melhassan.elsayed@ul.ie

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of medical education to communities' health is always at the centre of the thinking of medical educators, health authorities and other stakeholders. In 1995, the WHO introduced the concept of social accountability of medical schools as the need to direct the education, research and services functions of medical schools to address the priorities in health needs of the societies that are defined by collaboration of all partners, including the society themselves[1]. The definition of the concept was then further explained and elaborated on by the publication of the Global Consensus for Social Accountability of Medical Schools which describes ten strategic directions for medical schools to achieve social accountability[2].

As part of the global movement towards promoting the application of the social accountability concept in medical schools, the Eastern Mediterranean office of the WHO (WHO-EMRO) has published in 2015 a 'Review of medical education in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: challenges, priorities and a framework for action a document that sets social accountability as one of the priorities[3] for strengthening medical education in the region.

Despite that call from the EMRO-WHO, the reality on the ground after eight years does not reflect the needed situation for making Social Accountability a priority. In the year 2023, our scoping review of the implementation of social accountability in the Eastern Mediterranean Region revealed only 26 articles describing the applications of social accountability in the region, the most important – challenging- fact is that these publications came from seven out of the 22 countries in the region. More than that 19 out of the 26 articles were from only two countries[4].

The results of the scoping review above reflect the need for more work to analyse and come up with the challenges that prevent the application of social accountability in medical education in the region keeping in mind that the region has a long history of the application of the community-oriented and community-based medical education strategies dating back to 1978[5,6].

To support the movement towards social accountability and to facilitate the implementation of the WHO priorities and hence overcoming the challenges towards that, our qualitative thematic review of the evaluation of social accountability of medical schools in the Eastern Mediterranean Region that was published in 2022 has identified different factors that make medical schools socially accountable in the EMRO region[7]. Among those factors is the setup of the mission of the medical schools to have the social accountability concept as a prominent feature. The other factor is the governance and the type of leadership in medical schools, this factor goes well with other publications in promoting social accountability[8,9].

Another challenge for social accountability promotion that is mentioned in the international literature and needs to be considered in the EMRO is the type of accreditation standards used. The standards must move from the process standards to the outcome standards that consider the impact of the medical schools' activities on the health status of societies[10].

One of the biggest challenges for social accountability in the EMRO is the different contexts of the countries in the region. This difference and the above-mentioned challenges put extra efforts on the shoulders of medical education organisations and partners in the region to facilitate communication between countries and individual medical schools to ease the exchange of good practices towards social accountability.

REFERENCE

1. Boelen C, Heck J. Defining and measuring social accountability of medical schools. Vol. WHO/HRH/95. 1995.

2. GCSA. Global Consensus for Social Accountability of Medical Schools [Internet]. Vol. 2011, Global Consensus for Social Accountability of Medical Schools. 2010 [cited 2018 Oct 2]. Available from: http://healthsocialaccountability.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2011/06/11-06-07-GCSA-English-pdf-style.pdf.

3. WHO. Review of medical education in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: challenges, priorities and a framework for action [Internet]. 2015. Available from: https://vlibrary.emro.who.int/idr_records/review-of-medical-education-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-region-challenges-priorities-and-a-framework-for-action/.

4. Taha MH, Abdalla ME, Saleh Wadi MM, Khalafalla HE, Akbarilakeh M. The implementation of social accountability in medical schools in Eastern Mediterranean region: A scoping review. J Taibah Univ Med Sci [Internet]. 2023 Feb;18(1):84–97. Available from: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S1658361222001524.

5. Abdalla ME, Taha MH, Mukhtar WN, Elsanousi M. Impact of Community-Based Medical Education on Graduate Performance: A Qualitative Study Using a Critical Incident Technique. Heal Prof Educ [Internet]. 2022;8(1):38–44. Available from: https://hpe.researchcommons.org/journal/vol8/iss1/6

6. Hosny S, El Wazir Y, El Kalioby M, Farouk O, Ghaly M. Role of Suez Canal University, Faculty of Medicine in Egyptian Medical Education Reform. Heal Prof Educ [Internet]. 2016 Jun;2(1):44–50. Available from: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S2452301116300116.

7. Abdalla ME, Taha M, Wadi M, Khalafalla H. What makes a medical school socially accountable? A qualitative thematic review of the evaluation of social accountability of medical schools in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. East Mediterr Heal J [Internet]. 2022 May 29;28(5):381–9. Available from: https://applications.emro.who.int/EMHJ/V28/05/1020-3397-2022-2805-381-389-eng.pdf.

8. Koepke K, Walling E, Yeo L, Lachance E, Woollard R. Exploring social accountability in Canadian medical schools: broader perspectives. MedEdPublish [Internet]. 2020;9(1). Available from: https://mededpublish.org/articles/9-283.

9. Walling E, Lachance E, Yeo L, Koepke K, Wasik A, Woollard R. Key drivers of social accountability in nine Canadian medical schools. Med Teach [Internet]. 2021;43(2):182–8. Available from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1832205.

10. Abdalla ME. Suggested New Standards to Measure Social Accountability of Medical Schools in the Accreditation Systems. J Case Stud Accredit Assess. 2014;3:1–25.