

Impactfully bridging the gap: Medical student engagement in diabetic retinopathy screening

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ABSTRACT

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) remains a leading cause of preventable blindness in Malaysia, amid rising diabetes prevalence and limited screening coverage. This presentation explores the challenges faced in managing DR, including late detection and inadequate awareness, which contribute to significant visual impairment. It also emphasizes the critical role of early detection through retinal screening programs. In response, a collaborative initiative between medical students and the Ministry of Health was launched to enhance retinal screening efforts across underserved communities. Medical students received targeted training on fundus examination and DR identification, becoming integral members of screening teams. This involvement yielded multiple benefits: increasing community awareness, expanding screening coverage, and facilitating timely referrals for treatment. Furthermore, the program significantly enriched students' educational experience by providing practical, hands-on exposure to ophthalmic care, fostering a deeper understanding of diabetic complications and public health strategies. The integration of medical students into community screening activities not only bridges resource gaps but also cultivates future healthcare advocates committed to community service. This presentation highlights the importance of multi-sector collaboration in addressing diabetic eye disease, showcasing how medical student involvement can positively impact both community health outcomes and medical education. The model offers a sustainable approach for scaling up DR screening initiatives nationwide, emphasizing that empowering future physicians through active community engagement is vital in combating preventable blindness in Malaysia.

Keywords: Diabetic Retinopathy, Screening, Medical Students