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NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine students (from right) Daryl Tham, Jonathan Leong and Goh Yue Shan share with their audience exercises that are suitable for those with osteoarthritis. ST PHOTO: AZMI ATHNI

Giving talks helps improve medical students' oral skills

Rachel Oh

A programme that gets medical students to conduct public health talks has been found to be effective at training them to give medical advice and improve their communication skills.

This is according to research conducted by SingHealth Polyclinics (SHP), which introduced the training curriculum for third-year undergraduate students of the National University of Singapore Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine).

As part of a two-week attachment to family medicine, the students undergo training with SHP, where they get the chance to prepare for a talk they eventually give to an audience of polyclinic patients.

Nine in 10 students perceived the training as useful in their medical education, and 95 per cent said they learnt how to properly deliver talks, according to the research paper.

The figures are based on a survey of 120 medical students who went through the programme from 2012 to 2013. Some 450 have gone through the training since it began in 2012.

To evaluate the skills of the speakers, video recordings of the talks were reviewed by peers and family medicine faculty members.

Audiences reacted to the talks positively, with 88 per cent finding them useful.

There is a purpose to the talks, said Dr Shah Mitesh, a family physician at SHP Geylang and adjunct assistant professor at the department of medicine at NUS Medicine.

"Giving a health talk allows them (the students) to... speak in a simple language and connect with the patients," Dr Shah said.

Under the guidance of a family medicine instructor, each group of six to seven students selects a health-related topic to prepare and deliver at walk-in sessions.

NUS Medicine student Goh Yue Shan, 21, delivered a talk on osteoarthritis – the degeneration of joint cartilage – with her team yesterday at Geylang Polyclinic.

"This training allowed us to interact with patients on the ground level and see what their concerns are about," she said, and added that the team "can spend a longer time focusing on (educating the public on) preventive measures" before patients begin facing complications.

General clerk Poay Geok Loh, 59, appreciated the chance to learn more about osteoarthritis through the talk.

"It was good for us (the audience) because we learnt in advance how to prevent bone injuries. It has helped me a lot in preparing for the future."

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