TOWARDS PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL) TEACHING IN DENTISTRY – UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA EXPERIENCE

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Problem-based learning (PBL) has been considered to be a better teaching approach to didactic teaching. In this approach, lecturers serve as facilitators while the students are expected to source for information related to the learning issues that they have identified in their small group discussion session from available resources. The staff of the Oral Biology Department in their own way had tried to apply this approach in their tutorial classes since 1998 where the students were divided into a small group of 10-12 students per facilitator. The department was using remains of a foetus as a problem to identify learning issues associated with tooth development, age of the foetus and forensic and legal implications. This approach has since caught the interest of staff from other departments at the faculty and finally becomes a faculty interest. A PBL committee represented by at least one staff per department was then formed. The staff were encouraged to attend workshops and conferences related to PBL to prepare them the art of facilitating and to learn how to prepare PBL scenarios and tutor’s guides or PBL packages. The PBL session has been recently included in the dental undergraduate programme. Currently, the faculty has prepared 2 PBL packages for the Year 1 dental students and 1 package for the Year 2 dental students. 4 sessions of 7 hours were scheduled for each PBL package. The task of preparing the PBL packages was entrusted to at least 1 of the committee members agreed by the PBL committee who then would form a subcommittee with expertise related to the package. Upon completion, the PBL committee would go through the package. It took 3-4 meetings before the package was finalised. From the first PBL session organised by the faculty, it can be said that almost all the students participated actively in the small group discussion to identify the learning issues.