

The Dire Need to Include Leadership Education in the Medical School Curriculum

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The medical education curriculum is traditionally designed to educate the students about the fundamentals of basic and clinical medical sciences. For centuries, the educational curriculum has produced excellent physicians. With increasing focus on healthcare delivery over the past few decades, physicians have learned that while traditional education has successfully made outstanding clinicians, it has failed to prepare them for healthcare delivery challenges. As a result, healthcare executives worldwide have filled the vacuum in healthcare leadership. According to a recent survey, less than 5% of healthcare chief executive officers in the US are physicians¹. It has been increasingly recognized that the healthcare business differs from other markets as it involves empathy for ailing humanity. There has been an increasing number of physicians who feel less satisfied with their jobs. Unless and until physicians are part of the decision-making processes in healthcare delivery, we will continue to have a dilemma of unsatisfied physicians and patients. In my opinion, the fundamental flaw of current medical education is that it does not educate medical students about basic leadership principles. To meet the needs of twenty-first-century healthcare, we need physicians who can provide excellent clinical care to our patients and possess the ability to navigate the increasingly complex landscape of healthcare and lead the unmet needs of healthcare delivery. In short, we are producing physicians, while the world needs physician leaders. I would argue that physicians already possess innate needs for leadership. Integrity is the cornerstone of leadership, and society considers physicians to have the highest degree of integrity among all educated professionals. After all, the community members trust us with the decisions that impact their lives and health!

Physicians, by nature, are empathic people and bring out the humanistic side of leadership. Our patients, their families, and society trust us to make decisions for their health. It is only natural to consider physicians leading the way in ensuring concise and impactful healthcare delivery. While the traditional medical system was structured in a hierarchical manner, modern-day health systems increasingly rely on teamwork, where every healthcare team member is an asset and treated with the same degree of respect. The healthcare teams include physicians, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and pharmacists, among many other allied healthcare practitioners. In general, physicians are considered leaders of healthcare teams. Physicians of the current day and age need to work with other healthcare team members effectively to deliver the best possible care to their patients². Physicians in leadership roles must collaborate with hospital administrators to ensure a conducive professional environment where physicians and patients can feel safe and satisfied. We need to train future physicians in the basic principles of leadership with practical communication skills. The next question is, how do we achieve this goal? We need to include leadership education in the medical school curriculum. To make it effective, we should not grade students in this course. In my medical school years, I felt that any system requiring examinations or grades was a burden. We do not want to increase the burden on already “studied-out” medical students. The leadership course should be more of an optional, fun activity so that only those students who are interested in pursuing leadership roles in their careers can be a part of it. We should also ensure that for the interested students, there are ample resources for leadership education. It should include lectures on

leadership essentials, conversations with healthcare leaders, and shadowing healthcare executives to understand the scope of the healthcare issues we face and the soft skills required to handle these complicated dilemmas. We should carefully analyze this leadership curriculum's impact on medical students' careers and then make modifications as deemed necessary. We should encourage an environment where leadership courses are more in the format of open dialogue, where students can ask questions without any fear. We have an excellent opportunity to train a crop of physician leaders of the future who will not only be able to provide excellent clinical care to our patients but also lead the process of healthcare delivery in healthcare systems of the

future!

References

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