

Facilitating Professionalism: Ongoing Dialogs in Safe Spaces

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BACKGROUND

Learning Communities (LC) offer unique opportunities for relational continuity, a supportive learning environment, and reflective practice in medical school.

How students develop the requisite values, attitudes, and behaviors of a humanistic physician requires a shift in how they view themselves and how they express service to others.

Such shifts are largely transformational learning processes that emerge from critical reflection about one's beliefs, consideration of alternative perspectives, culminating in a reframing of beliefs.¹

Transformational learning occurs best in safe spaces where trust, autonomy, relational engagement, role modeling, and active dialog are supported. LC's offer the critical connections that can support this transformation.²

The JHUSOM Colleges Advisory Program has developed a longitudinal curriculum to establish safe space for such dialog, in the hopes of promoting students' professional formation.³

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Support students' personal and professional development during medical school
- ❖ Graduate knowledgeable and caring physicians prepared for and equipped to face complex situations in patient care and systems of care
- ❖ Establish life-long practices that support well-being and balance

Description

The JHUSOM Colleges Advisory Program Faculty meet with students during week-long "Topics in Medical Education" courses that occur approximately q 3 months in each year throughout the 4 year curriculum.

The work is done within "molecules" (one faculty and 5 students, the building block of our LC) utilizing a combination of narrative writing, drawing and sharing. Themes that arise include::

- **Transitions:** into medical school, onto the wards, into residency
- **Professionalism:** defining professional values, incorporating these into one's other core values, identifying and handling challenges to those values
- **Clinical relationships:** connections to and with patients and health care team members
- **Critical incidents:** on clinical services with patients and health care team members
- **Wellness and balance:** recognizing and managing the positive and negative impacts of clinical work on self.

CURRICULAR METHOD

Sample Session: Highlighting Clinical Relationships (Years 3,4)

- Session Length:** -90 minutes
Participants: -24 LC molecule groups with LC advisor
Flow:
-Check-ins (5-10 minutes), review of safety/confidentiality
-Narrative writing (7 minutes)
-Facilitated group discussion (70 minutes)
-Appreciative closing (3-5 minutes)

Reflection Prompt

Think about the patients and families you've seen or cared for on your recent rotation(s) and the relationships you may have formed with them. Perhaps there is one that stands out for you in some way. Take a moment to think about the impact that they have had on you:

- Describe the context of this relationship & how was it meaningful, impactful or challenging for you.
- How did this experience resonate with or challenge your internal values and your evolving identity as a physician?
- What did you learn about yourself and what medical practice might be like in the future?

Facilitated Group Discussion:

Reconvene the small group and ask students to share what they wrote. Encourage the group to listen and reflect on the meaning of this experience, highlighting how we can draw connections, offer support, and learn from each others' stories.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Student Survey of Advising Session Series. N = 307/480. 64% response rate

- 93% of students felt their advisors were "a lot" or "completely" effective as facilitators
- 87% of students noted the sessions "met" or "exceeded" expectations
- 76% of students felt the frequency of these sessions was "just right"

Sample Comments:

- "It has been very useful and therapeutic to reflect on powerful experiences."
- "I like that we do it in a group setting because I find that my colleagues are going through similar things and I can learn from their experiences as well"
- "They give us a time to step back and think about what it really means to be a physician"
- "Oftentimes, there is not enough time to process the issues of life and death that we deal with in helping and working with patients. These sessions allow for reflection, catharsis, and discussion that lets students know they have the support of their peers and mentors in growing as physicians"

DISCUSSION

- ❖ Students move through a variety of predictable and unpredictable challenges over the 4 years of medical school.
- ❖ Use of an LC model of relationally anchored dialogs recurring throughout the curriculum promotes reflective practice and catalyzes students' individual professional growth. These conversations also serve to enrich peer connections.
- ❖ Even those students who may not feel a need for support at a cross-sectional moment can nevertheless contribute to and gain from the wisdom of the "molecule" or group.
- ❖ Students value the time and space dedicated to this work and also the contributions of their peers in the effort.
- ❖ These sessions can help promote accountability to peers, an openness to discussing emotional aspects of medical practice, and create a shared framework of professional identity.

REFERENCES

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