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WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO DELIVER THE TOPIC OF EMPATHY IN A MEDICAL CURRICULUM?

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Background: Empathy is the capacity to know emotionally what another is experiencing from within the frame of reference of that other person. Empathy is a crucial attribute in all medical professionals, yet it is known to decline through the years of medical education.

Aim: This study aims to explore current evidence which may guide medical schools towards the most successful method of incorporating empathy into the medical curriculum.

Method: An electronic search was undertaken on the Medline (Ovid) database of papers published between 2006 and 2016. Keywords included Empathy, Medical Education, Curriculum, Undergraduate, Student, Medical school and University. The search retrieved 347 results, 17 of which were relevant, and 3 of which were selected.

Results: The interventions used in the selected studies were a mind-body course, a video-based workshop, and a drama-based workshop. The Jefferson Score of Physician Empathy (JSPE) was measured before and after these interventions. All 3 showed an improvement in empathy, however, the improvement was only significant for the latter 2 interventions, the workshops. The latter two studies also showed that without reinforcement of the teachings, the improvement in empathy did not last.

Conclusion: Workshops in which students must watch or physically enact situations involving patients are shown to significantly increase medical student empathy, as measured by JSPE. Improvements in empathy are shown to decline after the intervention, unless reinforced later in a student's education.

Recommendations: More research into the efficacy of other methods of teaching empathy is needed, such as reflective essays, patient interviews, and communication skills.

Biography

Feray Ozdesa is a young yet keen, proactive medical student currently she is studying at Norwich Medical School. During her time there, she has actively expressed an interest in medical education which is reflected in her undertaking of numerous independent research projects on the subject. She also keeps interest in geriatric medicine in which she plans to take a year out from medical school to intercalate.

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