

Letter to the Editor

Ethical teaching for physiology educators

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Dear Sir,

The ethical foundations of professional activities in medical sciences suitably cover many faculty-related professional activities, including research and publication ethics or ethical code of conduct in practicing medicine. However, only some importance is incorporated into ethical approaches in medical teaching! Basic medicine as physiology education generally focuses on the mechanics and philosophy of teaching, but only sometimes, it discusses the issues of ethical teaching.

The education system of society stands on teachers. Their position is the strongest in the interface of transmitting knowledge and skills with values. It is not that easy to become an 'ethical medical teacher' as there are very few guidelines or rules that may follow as principles of ethical teaching in physiological sciences as a part of the medical curriculum. Ethical teaching goes beyond complying with the legal regulations regarding discrimination or harassment of any kind to the subjects. Medical teacher has an additional aspect to their ethical teaching expectations as the teacher-student relationship and interactive performance differ from other disciplines.^[1] Hence, medical teachers and students will likely need clarification on this issue. Attitudes such as the nature of care, trust, respect and integrity are essential in preparing tomorrow's physicians. Beyond these, there are many issues that medical faculty members may face as teachers, which are quite different by nature as compared to clinical ethics or research ethics.^[2]

Physiology teachers deal with many ethical issues. They encounter issues such as inappropriate distribution of resources based on teachers' talent, time, interest, experience, workload and obligatory handling of several non-academic administrative problems. Hence, understanding 'ethical teaching' will provide a framework for the development of a conceptual approach to the ethics of teaching.^[3]

From the classroom to bedside, medical teaching is a dynamic process that induces positive influence, professional judgement and profound commitment to the students. However, such inductions are only possible with proper ethical synchronisation between medical students and teachers.^[4] There is an inherent power inequity in the student-teacher relationship, reflecting the future power imbalance between the patient and the physician. Faculty must understand and appreciate this inequity to role model appropriate behaviour.^[5]

The developing emphasis on ethical behaviour in the well-established fields of ethics in biomedical research is also an essential issue for physiology educators. Knowing ethics in physiology education will allow physiology educators to explicitly embrace education ethics in the context of professional behaviour as medical researchers and supervisors.^[6]

Medical education programmes must recognise the issues of ethical teaching in medicine and consider including 'Teaching Ethics' in faculty development.^[7] Medical teachers must get

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training on ethical behaviours like how to protect students' confidentiality, how to respect students, what should be the professionally appropriate relationship between student and teacher, and how to maintain academic integrity and fair and unbiased adjudications or assessments for their students. Medical educators, especially in physiology, not only must disseminate subjective knowledge but also incorporate their attitude, understanding, behaviour and professionalism, providing critical role models for their students.

Declaration of patient consent

Patient's consent not required as there are no patients in this study.

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Conflicts of interest

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