

Editorial

Ethics in Medical Training

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«I will hold him who has taught me the art of medicine as equal to my parents and to live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine, and to regard his offspring as equal to my brothers in male lineage and to teach them this art-if they desire to learn it-without fee and covenant; to give a share of the precepts and oral instruction and all the other learning to my sons and to the sons of him who has instructed me and to pupils who have signed the covenant and have taken the oath according to medical law, but to no one else.»

Hippocrates of Cos (460-377 BC)

Beautiful are the words of this Hippocratic Oath, in some respects useful for romantic reminiscences only, and not for seeing the reality of an ethics in the teaching of medicine, one the professor must preserve and pass down to his students-the same ethics for those who become clinicians as well as surgeons. An ethics sometimes employed preferentially by impersonal economic aspects guided by self-interest.

In our field, this ethics has evolved from Indo-European and later Judeo-Christian ideas, developed originally in Europe and later in America. Indo-European ethics achieved its greatest development in ancient Greece near 475 BC and was passed down from Homer to Heliodorus, and later to Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Heraclitus. As we can see, Hippocrates incorporated all of these ideas into his famous Hippocratic Oath, giving rise to a Western Ethics based on Pythagorean principles.

When talking about modern ethics we must take into account, as one of its most important foundations, the principle of man as an autonomous being. Beauchamp and Chil-

dress note that one of modern ethics' main pillars is respect for autonomy, the rejection of malice and affirmation of charity, which in turn belong to the principles of ethics and constitute the foundations of bioethics.

We must also take into consideration the existing risk in biomedical professions, where interaction with people is direct and personal, of quickly and insensitively depersonalizing a human being by turning him or her into a number, a bed, or a disease. If we are not careful, we may end up adopting this undesirable behavior in our daily clinical work and research. Fernández Vázquez notes that such risks represent a great challenge to be overcome in a modern physician's education, which must be scientific, up-to-date, humanistic, and social, but above all ethical.

The medical profession must face many ethical aspects-a few examples are abortion, informed consent, a terminal patient's dignity, premature deaths, assisted suicide, and the patient's right to privacy. Various components are involved in the treatment of ethical problems, including the teacher, the student, the patient, and the teaching, learning, and research processes.

The professor

Teaching may be defined as the act by which a person directs another person(s) to develop a potential, and is expressed in behavior that must show respect for the professor's and student's freedom and autonomy. During the entire educational process, the professor relies on a significant number of collaborators to achieve his mission, from institutions where he teaches (universities and hospitals) to professional collaborators, assistants, higher-ranked residents, visiting professors, etc. But all these actors have the obligation to direct learning based on the five basic (and ethical) principles of learning formulated by Bedolla, which are:

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1) to focus on the question or issue posed by the student; 2) to give the student enough time and resources to apply what has been learned; 3) to allow an individual process to take place in accordance with the student's internal circumstances; 4) to give the student the opportunity to explore and define the implications and consequences of his or her answer and the opportunity to verify it under specific circumstances; and 5) to give the student the opportunity to practice what has been learned so it may be incorporated into his or her way of thinking and lead to new questions.

A professor must have certain abilities such as: to facilitate learning, diagnose problems in learning and seek solutions with the student, successfully guide the student and coordinate resources so the student may accomplish set goals.

We may conclude that the professor's bioethical principles of activity are: humanism, autonomy, and freedom; respect for the group; to follow the learning principles; and an open attitude towards learning, staying up-to-date in all teaching and learning fields and professional techniques.

The student

The student must be open to undergoing changes in behavior as he moves forward in the learning of knowledge, techniques, and attitudes that will subsequently become part of his personal behavior as a professional and future teacher.

The attributes to be earned by a successful student are: to be flexible in the order of learning with respect to his course of study, and to adapt to the opportunities and resources offered during his training by defining his objectives accordingly; to accept the results of his evaluations; the self-confidence to successfully acquire the knowledge imparted; the good will to take risks and explore the information with different objectives; the perseverance to continue working to achieve his objectives, as well as the prudence and humility to act as his teacher's younger colleague; the responsibility to accept what he does and to compare the learning guidance he receives with what he himself has found during the process of seeking a specific objective.

The patient

Regarding the patient, he has a right to know that the team in charge of his care is made up of the professor and his students, doctors-in-training who must be supervised by a physician qualified as a professor by an educational institution.

To have a good relationship with his medical team, the patient must follow the following principles: demand respect for his rights, and for the norms and regulations issued by learning and healthcare institutions; that he be informed of which doctors are in training and not allow that they act without the supervision of their teachers; and, finally, that his integrity and privacy be respected.

Norms regarding ethical behavior in postgraduate teaching and learning processes

In Mexico, the postgraduate teaching and learning process is regulated through legal aspects of civil, labor and criminal law through «NOM-090-SSA1-1994 Norma Oficial Mexicana para la Organización y Funcionamiento de Residencias Médicas,» in effect since September 22, 1994. This norm, which regulates the teaching of the specialization known as a residency or postgraduate medical studies, contains the following chapters:

1. Characteristics of medical units hosting residents
2. Entry into the National System of Medical Residencies
3. Promotions and changes in location
4. Organization of learning administrative units within the hosting units
5. Residents' rights
6. Residents' obligations
7. On duty
8. Incentives
9. Sick leave and other licenses
10. Residencies
11. Professors for specialized residencies
12. Accordance with international norms

Research as a fundamental part of medical training

We must consider that, as Perez-Tamayo notes, the objectives of medicine are: to preserve life, to cure disease or, when not possible, to always offer consolation and comfort to the patient and prevent premature and unnecessary deaths. These objectives are to be achieved through continuous study, without settling merely on diagnosing and treating disease but rather understanding the patient and relying on research as a valuable tool in the evolution and development of daily professional practice.

The professor and student must be researchers *per se*, taking into consideration that clinical research is part of their daily tasks and also part of their obligations in their search for truth; furthermore, they are an important step in the development of teaching medicine in universities. Such activity must adapt to established international principles in research on humans, for which the Nuremberg Code was developed. While this code of ethics in research was the result of a painful experience during World War II, it has not remained static, but rather some of its components have been added or modified throughout time. Still, the spirit of this code remains unchanged and is applied universally.

Corollary

Dynamic participants in the process of human resource training in healthcare include: the professor, the student, and the patient (dynamic group), for which there must always be great ethical responsibility, from the professor towards

the student (in his work as teacher), as well as from the student towards the professor (during learning), and from both towards the patient to preserve the quality of his being human. Teaching, learning and conduct towards the patient must also be exercised with autonomy and freedom, but the norms of teaching and learning in the spirit of humanism, science and ethical behavior must always be applied.

Clinical research is a component of the progress of science and an important part of daily tasks; nevertheless, the student must be guided by his professors to carry out his clinical research work within an ethical framework.

The dynamic unit of professor, student, and patient is regulated by universal legal aspects of civil, labor and criminal law. Ethics occupies an important place in this relationship.

«Good teaching guides logical reasoning while ethical teaching shapes the feelings, leading the dynamic group to explore its own being.»

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