

Narrative Mentorship and Professional Identity Formation: Reflections from a National Educational Event in Qatar

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Abstract: Professional identity formation is a central goal of medical education, shaping how learners understand the meaning and values of clinical practice. During a national educational event in Qatar, an experienced surgeon shared his personal professional journey with more than 700 students, focusing on uncertainty, failure, mentorship, and resilience rather than technical achievement. This manuscript presents a reflective perspective on that educational encounter rather than a formal empirical study. The narrative prompted open student reflections on fear, belonging, and the realities of a medical career, revealing the strong emotional and educational impact of narrative mentorship. This experience highlights how authentic clinician stories can strengthen professional identity, address the hidden curriculum, and support whole-person development within educational settings. As healthcare continues to advance technologically, intentional integration of narrative mentorship into health professions education remains essential for cultivating reflective and resilient future clinicians.

Keywords: medical education, mentorship, experience, students

Introduction

Medical education increasingly recognizes the importance of professional identity formation (PIF): the process through which learners understand not only *how to act* like clinicians but *why the work matters*.^{1,2} In Qatar, the ITQAN Clinical Simulation and Innovation Center has become a national hub for experiential learning. During a large educational event titled “The Future of Healthcare”, an experienced surgeon shared his personal professional journey with more than 700 students. In this article we use the term narrative mentorship to describe educational encounters in which clinicians share lived professional experiences, including uncertainty, setbacks, and turning points, to support learners’ understanding of professional values and identity. This perspective article reflects on that event and its potential implications for professional identity formation in health professions education.

The Experience

On a bright morning, the 450-seat auditorium at ITQAN filled beyond capacity. Students, some in high school uniforms, others in medical scrubs, crowded the aisles. When the speaker took the stage, the atmosphere shifted. Rather than focusing on technological achievements or career milestones, he described formative moments from his training, including uncertainty during early clinical rotations, the influence of mentors who modeled humility and perseverance, and the emotional realities of caring for patients during difficult circumstances. These reflections emphasized resilience, gratitude, and the importance of purpose in medicine. Following the talk, students asked candid questions about fear of failure, the rigor of medical training, and whether they truly “belonged” in medicine.

One student remarked quietly, “This is the first time someone described medicine not as a system, but as a life”. While this observation represents an informal reflection rather than systematically collected data, it illustrates the type of response that narrative encounters can evoke among learners.

Educational Insights and Implications for Health Professions Education

The session at ITQAN illustrated the impact of narrative mentorship in medical education.³ When clinicians share lived experiences, including doubts, failures, and turning points, students may engage with the profession in ways that differ from traditional didactic instruction. Such narratives can also help illuminate aspects of the hidden curriculum by challenging the perception that medical careers unfold without difficulty.^{4,5} The reflections described here arise from a single educational event and were not systematically collected or analyzed and therefore should be interpreted as illustrative observations rather than generalizable findings. Nevertheless, the experience suggests potential educational applications. Institutions might consider incorporating narrative sessions into simulation-based learning environments, encouraging clinicians to discuss professional challenges and resilience, providing opportunities for guided student reflection, and supporting faculty development in narrative competence.

Conclusion

Advances in technology will continue to shape the future of healthcare, yet educational experiences that communicate professional values remain important. This reflective account suggests that narrative mentorship may provide one avenue for supporting professional identity formation among learners. Educational institutions may benefit from intentionally creating opportunities for clinicians to share authentic professional experiences alongside traditional scientific training.

Ethics Statement

This article presents a reflective perspective on an educational event and does not report systematically collected research data involving human participants. Student comments referenced in the manuscript represent informal observations and were not gathered through structured research methods. Institutional ethical approval was therefore not required.

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Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

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