

The CanMEDS scholar: the neglected competency in tomorrow's doctors

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Dear editor

In 1996, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada proposed a competency-based framework describing the core competencies of specialist physicians, one of which was a scholar.¹ The UK General Medical Council has since provided advice on developing teachers and trainers in undergraduate medical education.² However, guidance about how to most effectively incorporate this advice into the medical curriculum remains unclear.

Everyone within medical education and academia has a role and responsibility to play in promoting a healthy and positive research culture that is conducive to the training of young scientists and doctors.³ It is imperative for students to learn how irresponsible research practice may hinder scientific progress⁴ or cause undue harm to society at large such as the well-publicized, and now disproved and discredited, case of a purported link between autism and the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine.⁵

Unfortunately, many universities do not sufficiently teach students how to become a good researcher, how to publish successfully, or how to conduct responsible research. A recent survey of a cohort of 515 UK medical students found that only 22% of students had been taught how to write a paper and only 30% had been taught how to write an abstract.⁶ This study also identified that only 12% of students surveyed had any experience of applying for ethics committee approval for a research project,⁶ thus raising concerns about whether students are aware of the different types of research necessitating ethics approval and the types of research that do not require ethics approval.

The lack of training related to research methodologies and publications led the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations to organize its first pre-General Assembly workshop during their meeting in Tunisia in March 2014, with the aim of providing insight into good research practice and dissemination of results. Moreover, in the last 20 years, with the advent of the Internet and the diffusion of accessible computing among the masses, we have witnessed a total revolution in the dissemination of information. The advantages of new technologies from social networking to artificial intelligence and from big data exchange to mobile processing are now everyday concepts that define the scientific landscape within which current medical students work. As such, it is vital that medical students continue to have the opportunity to develop scholarly principles early on in their careers, as this will promote a lifelong commitment to reflective learning and dissemination and application of evidence-based medicine.¹

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Disclosure

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