

A Response to the Views of Emotional Intelligence Being Higher in Residents Who Took a Gap Year Before Medical School [Letter]

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Dear editor

We would like to extend our gratitude to Shahid et al for providing an insight into how emotional intelligence (EI) is positively associated with taking time off prior to matriculating into medical school.¹ Given that a high EI is an essential characteristic that all medical professionals should have, we found this paper to be thought stimulating. However, we believe certain factors could be improved to further the impact of the study and widen its contribution to the education of healthcare professionals of the future.

EI is significantly associated with patient trust and the development of a positive patient–doctor relationship.² However, the study did not capture other determinants of EI, such as age and socioeconomic background. Razia et al showed that a higher socioeconomic background correlated with a better EI, as well as with academic achievement.³ Therefore, it also postulates how EI is not only important for communication and social interaction but for achieving better examination results and successfully passing the degree.

Moreover, Shahid et al¹ only measured EI at one time point and thus was unable to confirm when and where the clinician developed such skills. Similarly, the reasons as to why these students took time off or what they did in depth is not discussed. It could be that those who decided to take time off, already had a higher EI and this continued forward into their professional life. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the causative relationship, it could be suggested that further qualitative data are acquired and EI is measured during the medical school entry process and at several stages of their education. This will improve faculty understanding and identify whether taking time off or perhaps further EI education, is something that could be added to medical training.

Furthermore, the article uses the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory Questionnaire to assess emotional intelligence. Although this was found to be a useful method, an extensive literature review stated the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) is the most researched and validated assessment for EI, with use in over 1500 studies.⁴ A UK study used this scoring system to illustrate how EI, and specifically “managing emotions”, changes throughout the curriculum, with senior students showing a greater score than junior students.⁵ This stipulates that EI is developed in association with greater exposure to experiences

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and therefore further explains why students who took time off prior to their degree had a higher EI.

In conclusion, we found the association of EI and taking time off prior to entering a medical degree to be very informative. However, further research into different factors that play a role on EI need to be explored. The methodology used could be improved, with the aim of gaining a greater understanding on how to improve medical students EI and thus producing better healthcare professionals of the future.

Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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