

Self-care for Medical Students: Developing a Module based on a Holistic and Energetic Understanding of the Human Person

Eunice J Minford, Northern Health and Social Care Trust and Queens University Belfast, N. Ireland

Introduction

The College of Medicine¹ has identified a 'crisis in caring' and a 'crisis in commitment' where doctors have lost the ability to care and be compassionate, treating patients as little more than objects on a conveyor belt to be fixed.

It is proposed that the root of this crisis lies in the fact that doctors and medical students lack the understanding of how to truly care for themselves and thus it follows that true care for all others will also be deficient. Medical Schools do not universally incorporate self care into their programs.

Context

Doctors have higher rates of suicide and substance misuse than the general population and equally as high rates of mental ill health and depression.²

These traits are often present in medical school³. Medical training and working in medicine both have a high level of stress. Medical students need to be trained to respond appropriately to this stress.

Definition of Self-care

Self-care is the ability to care for the whole self: Mind, body, heart, spirit and soul.

Key Premises

- 1 Each of us is worthy of giving deep love, care and tenderness to one's self.
- 2 In order to deliver true care to another, one must first deliver that care to one's self in equal measure.
- 3 Choices of daily living are a great form of medicine, leading to improved self care.

Aims

To develop self-aware and self-caring medical students who provide true care to their patients by knowing it for themselves. To engender students who combine the wisdom of the heart and the intelligence of the mind.



Student Selected Component (SSC) in Self-care

- Twice a year there are three week long SSC blocks for 3rd year medical students at QUB
- This can be translated to other medical schools
- Knowledge, skills and attitudes pertaining to self-care, based on holistic understanding that is all encompassing
- Combination of theory and practical sessions delivered via group tutorials, involving group discussion and small group work.

Topics

- 1 Who is the Self that is being cared for in self-care?
- 2 What are the stressors and barriers to self-care in the medical profession?
- 3 "All is Energy" - exploring how this relates to the human being leading to an understanding of the concepts of energetic responsibility and integrity
- 4 Exploring how mind, body, heart, spirit and soul interconnect
- 5 Using the body as an honest marker of disharmony, learning to read your body
- 6 Exploring the psychoemotional world of doctors
- 7 Effect of emotions on physical health and wellbeing

- 8 Psychoneuroimmunology, epigenetics and psychosomatic medicine
- 9 Diet, sleep, exercise, work, energetic state of being: impact on health. Developing routine and rhythm.
- 10 Health Myths
- 11 Promoting peer support, having a personal GP, accessing appropriate care

Practical Sessions

Energetic Awareness	Yoga - body awareness
Gentle Breath Meditation	Conscious Presence - mind/body awareness
Role play e.g. compassionate presence	Gentleness in action
Walking the Talk	

Assessment

- Attendance, attitude and professionalism
- Reflective essay
- Essay, poster or debate on aspect of self-care

Evaluation

Short term and (resources permitting) long term outcomes evaluation using qualitative and quantitative methods to ascertain if:

- Student and doctor behaviours are more self-caring as a result of the module
- There is improved doctor wellbeing and enhanced patient care.

References

- 1) College of Medicine: www.collegeofmedicine.org.uk/crisis-medicine
- 2) The Suffering of Physicians. T Cole, N Carlin. The Lancet vol374 9699 pg 1414-1415
- 3) Burnout and Suicidal Ideation amongst US Medical Students. L Dyrbye, M Thomas, S Massie et al Ann Intern Med. 2 Sept 2008; 149 (5): 334-341