

Promoting Medical Professionalism Through Narratives: The Students' Perspective

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Project Purpose

- We sought to promote faculty teaching and student learning of professionalism through appreciative inquiry
- We asked faculty role models to tell small student groups stories about their positive experiences with professionalism in response to student questions
- We asked students to write narratives based on the stories and to reflect on those narratives

Study Purpose

- To explore whether and how this process of story-telling, writing narratives, and reflecting on the narratives promoted student learning of professionalism

Methods

■ Setting

- Combined 6-year BA-MD degree program
- Students participate in longitudinal learning communities led by a physician called a docent who serves as a role model for students

■ Participants

- 62 students interviewed 33 docents about their experiences with professionalism
- 36 students wrote 132 narratives based on docents' stories
- Each of the 36 students chose the one story that was most inspirational and reflected on the story

Methods: Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Procedures

- Several students in each learning community volunteered to interview their docent about positive experiences with professionalism
- Students used a semi-structured interview guide with questions such as:
 - Tell us about a time when you or another physician went the extra mile to help a patient
 - Tell us about a time when you were most satisfied with your practice of medicine
- Students and docents were trained for the interview and story-telling, respectively

Methods: AI Procedures

- After the interviews, students wrote narratives detailing the stories docents told them
 - Students were instructed to write the story “as close to verbatim as possible”
- Students reflected on the stories by answering open-ended questions such as:
 - Imagine how this story might change your attitude or approach to other people

Methods: Analysis of Narratives

- Two experienced qualitative researchers used standard techniques to detect themes about professionalism in the narratives
- They developed a coding scheme via an iterative process with periods of independent coding and discussion to resolve disagreement
- The themes in a random sample of 20 narratives matched the existing definitions of professionalism
 - The researchers then decided to use the Arnold and Stern definition to assist in the development of inclusion and exclusion criteria for each theme

Methods: Analysis of Reflections

- Two experienced qualitative researchers using standard techniques analyzed student reflections to:
 - Discover the lessons students learned about professionalism and
 - Determine how the process supported their learning
- After reading a sample of the reflections and generating initial impressions independently, the researchers collaborated in creating an open-coding scheme
- They refined the initial scheme through paragraph-by-paragraph comparison and negotiation
- They verified the scheme by analyzing the remaining reflections

Results: What Students Learned

- In the reflections students demonstrated awareness of the same major principles of professionalism that the docents conveyed in their stories
 - Accountability (*reflection #1*)
 - Altruism (*reflection #2*)
 - Excellence (*reflection #3*)
 - Humanism (*reflection #4*)

Results: What Students Learned

- The degree of awareness of the professionalism principles that students demonstrated ranged from deep through superficial
 - Deep reflection (*reflection #5*)
 - Superficial reflection (*reflection #6*)
- A few students, mostly in Year 1, missed the point of the story: they did not frame their reflection in terms of professionalism; they saw the story as justification of pursuing their own self interests (*reflection #7*)

Results: How Students Learned

- Students gave personal meaning to the narratives by:
 - Applying the principles of professionalism to new contexts (*reflection #8*)
 - Exploring connections among professionalism principles (*reflection #9 – first paragraph*)
 - Empathizing with characters in the narratives (*reflection #10*)

Results: How Students Learned

- Narratives served these functions for students:
 - Sparked new ideas about professionalism (reflection #11)
 - Reinforced previously held conceptions of professionalism (*reflection #9 – second paragraph*)
 - Suggested ways to resolve future professionalism conflicts (*reflection #12*)

Results: How Students Learned

- Narratives also served these functions for students:
 - Heightened students' commitment to professionalism (*reflection #13*)
 - Deepened their relationships with docents (*reflection #14*)
 - Offered inspiration (*reflection #15*)
 - Provided enjoyment (*reflection #16*)

Conclusions

- Appreciative inquiry consisting of faculty stories, student-generated narratives, and reflections on those stories can foster student learning of professionalism
- Students could benefit from feedback to promote deeper learning