Behavioral Science and Medical Education: The Role of Reflective Exercises in Developing Medical Professionalism

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In the context of medical education, reflective exercises provide the opportunity for behavioral scientists to create an emotional learning environment for residents. This environment differs pointedly from the fast-paced and stressful characteristics of traditional residency education and allows residents the time and the support to identify and process the difficult experiences and emotions they encounter during their practice of medicine. It is the goal of this study to dispel some of the arguments against the value of behavioral science in medical education by studying the effects of reflective processes (i.e., Balint groups and medical retreats) on medical professionalism.

**Method**

- **Balint groups**: structured group meetings that focus on the emotional impact of one patient case on a member of the group. The goal is to offer focused feedback that helps the presenter uncover emotions about their case and move toward constructive self-awareness.

- **Medical Retreats**: combine a number of different reflective processes. Common themes include small group discussion, case presentations, role play, and physical activity.

- **Data**: A total of 50 peer-reviewed papers were collected and analyzed from a number of different databases using ‘Balint group’ and ‘Retreats AND Medical education’ as key words.

**Conclusion**

The results demonstrated very diverse research topics, with few studies focusing on the same processes and results within their reflective programs. Although the qualitative data reliably reported that self-reflection provides medical residents and doctors some benefit, researchers have failed to reflect this benefit in quantitative terms. Nevertheless, common themes within the qualitative data suggest that the reflective exercises were effective in increasing participants’ emotional intelligence (EI). As EI and medical professionalism share important qualities and components, future research should be conducted to quantitatively measure the effect of reflective programs on EI. Introducing EI measurements in a medical education program may provide an evidence-based classification of the type of non-technical skills provided by the behavioral sciences that medical training has traditionally found hard to address and incorporate into the standard curriculum.

**REFERENCES**

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