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Bring philosophy back to medical schools

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Dear Editor,

In recent years, the professional ethics agenda has attracted the attention of prestigious universities all over the world. Yet in Iran, though frequently debated, little fundamental operational action has been taken in this regard. In the area of medical services, we have always expected the academic graduates to provide services at the highest level of professional and ethical standards. When looking at the educational curriculum of the students of medicine, we encounter a lot of missing links in teaching professional ethics. One of them is the lack of educational philosophy in general and medical philosophy in particular in medical schools. As Zakariya Razi put it, in addition to being a doctor, a physician should be a philosopher, too.[1,2] Bearing this in mind, how can we expect a physician without a true philosophical foundation to behave altruistically and empathetically with patients? It seems that a good share of the problems in the field of medicine can be attributed to such a gap. In other words, medical schools should be seriously concerned with enriching the students' philosophical knowledge about health, humane spirits, life, death, rights and dignity alongside teaching medical knowledge and clinical skills. The people's health could then be more confidently entrusted with the doctors who deeply understand the holy and critical nature of their jobs.

To this end, the below educational continuum of professional ethics was developed by the authors of the present paper, inspired and motivated by philosophical and social texts (Figure 1), including philosophical foundations and foundations of altruistic and empathetic views towards patients. This is an attempt to help students of medicine gain a true, endogenous conception of working on health, which throughout his/her lifetime can act as a rational and ethical bedrock for their professional activities. This personal and individual gem is the basic and necessary condition for most medical professional skills like the quality of the relationship with patients and the motivation for learning, which has been a longtime dream for most of medical schools. However, it should be noted that physicians do not operate in a vacuum and the dominant ethical and human values of the society could affect their views and behaviors.

This framework necessitates adding philosophy to medical students' curriculum or students at least need to become aware of philosophical views through various measures. For this purpose, scholars can suggest and promote several operational measures. As insurance, at times, encouraging students to read novels like Hugo's *Les Miserables* or Tolstoy's *War and Peace* alongside informal free discussions on those novels could have a moral effect on students that taking several courses at university does not.
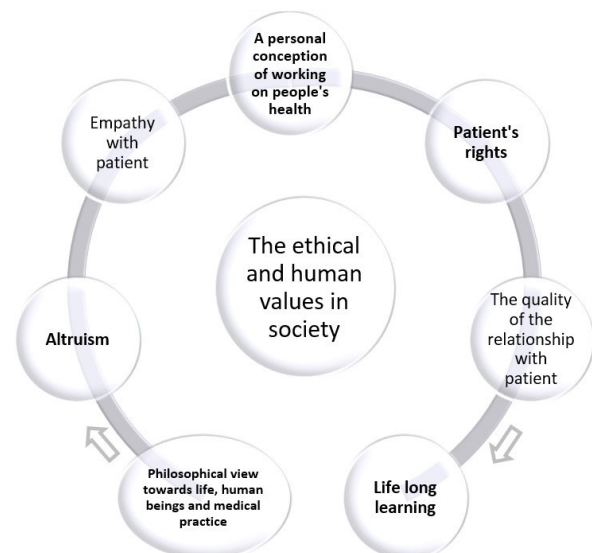

Figure 1. The continuum of professional ethics development in a humane society (Sadeghieh Model).

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The challenge, therefore, would be to introduce these concepts to medical students. In doing so, educational scholars can come up with various and more effective methods.

Ethical approval
Not applicable.

Competing interests
Authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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