

Letter to Editor



## Improving students' imagination and empathy as a method of teaching medical ethics

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### Dear Editor

Some time ago, for a research project, we interviewed many patients admitted to different hospital wards and staff.

While gathering information on the dissatisfaction of patients with the behavior of some healthcare staff, we asked patients to score the healthcare staff's behavior on a scale ranging from 0 to 100 and to explain the reason for scores other than 100.

In one ward, we observed that almost all patients gave the healthcare staff a score of 100. We interviewed the ward's supervisor. Interestingly, the point that attracted our attention was that the supervisor had previously been hospitalized and had experienced healthcare staff behavior from the patient's perspective. Thus, when she became a nurse, she treated patients in the manner she had expected to be treated when she had been hospitalized. She could look at staff behavior from the patient perspective. Later, when she became a supervisor, she treated the ward nurses with the same philosophy. Her behavior created a friendly environment with understanding and empathy between patients and nurses.

We also interviewed staff on other wards. The healthcare staff who showed higher capability of imitating and putting themselves in patients' shoes (showing empathy), were less aggressive and more empathetic with patients.

Almost all had a turning point when they said to each other, "If one of my family members or I were in a patient's place, how would I like the health care staff to treat us?"

In most universities, medical ethics education is usually based on teaching codes of ethics and laws, providing students with some information and acquainting them with applicable rules and codes. This awareness is helpful, though it does not guarantee the observation of medical ethics.

To teach professional ethics, universities are recommended to design programs that strengthen students' imagination and empathy. In this way, they can imagine themselves in the patient's place; thus, they try to learn the codes of ethics and rules to apply so they can treat patients with their best interests in mind. Improving students' imagination and empathy should be the basis for future medical ethics education programs.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

### Authors' contributions

All authors have equally contributed to this paper.

### Ethical approval

Not applicable.

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