CHARACTER TEACHING MOMENTS IN MEDICINE

BACKGROUND

Character is the primary tool with which one impacts others and is expressed as we live our purpose in life. In medicine, successful interactions between patients and physicians involve character, which can often be challenged by the complexity of the situation. One of the most important influences on providing high value care during an interaction with any patient involves the demonstration of character by the practitioner. Most learners (and faculty) rely on observation of role models to convey issues of character development. But in today's environment, these role models may not be sufficient or may, in fact, be modeling character traits that impede our goal of high-value care.

A workshop was created to introduce the concept of “character teaching moments” as a teaching tool for faculty.

METHODS

As a part of the workshop, a survey was created to assess attitudes and opinions regarding teaching medical students character. A survey was preferred given that it was administered in real-time which allowed for improved participation. For the purposes of gathering information about the workshop, the survey was cross-sectional.

The survey assessed:
1. The impact of teaching about character
2. The frequency in which character is taught
3. The most useful information provided in the workshop
4. Space to allow for open-ended comments

RESULTS

I believe that teaching about character will have ___ impact on learners:
- no
- a little
- a moderate
- a lot

I have taught/will teach explicitly about character in ___% of days I interact with learners.

CONCLUSIONS

- Using character teaching moments to enhance learners’ own character is possible
- Faculty members believe that teaching about character will have significant impact on learners
- After being exposed to the idea of using character teaching moments, faculty members are much more likely to teach about character
- The impact of teaching character to learners needs to be evaluated

MY ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

CURIOSITY

I first became interested in the idea of teaching character during an early classroom session of the Kinetic teaching academy. This session introduced the idea that character can be taught, something I didn’t think was possible. I was of the believe that character is innate to an individual and possibly tweaked by environment, relationships, and life events to further refine it. I came to realize that character is fluid, able to be influenced, and most importantly, it can be enhanced.

Having explored, researched, and discovered how character can be influenced in the clinical setting, I am left wondering if the character teaching moments will have longevity and lasting impact on the character of future physicians.

CONNECTIONS

My mentors were instrumental in helping to construct the framework for this topic. Multiple informal conversations were had with educators of all experience levels from various medical departments.

I have realized the profound impact that non-clinical educators can have on students’ development, including character. Moving forward, these educators should be involved with further development of character teaching moments.

CREATING VALUE

This work has identified that character teaching moments exist and can be used to enhance humanistic learning within medical education. By using moments in which ideal (or less than ideal) character is displayed, teachers can contribute positively to their learners’ character development. These efforts will ultimately result in developing a more complete and humanistic physician.