

Medical Education Interest Group Newsletter

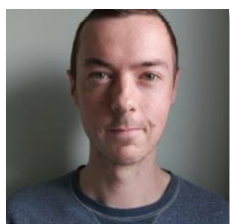
Is It Right to Teach Things that are Probably Wrong?

February, 2020

WARWICK
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Notes from Meeting

Thank you to all of those who came to our February Medical Education Interest Group meeting!



Dr. Greg Moorlock started off this thought-provoking session with asking the room: "How wrong could an answer be that a student gives, that would still be able to be an answer that could be justified?" Thus began our exploration into the challenges of teaching ethics to medical students, and evaluating their understanding of it. While medical students need to become good doctors – doctors with ethics and morals - the question is *HOW* do we teach ethics to medical students in a way that is useful, even though it has to be done a way that paradoxically presents complex ethical theories and ideas in a truncated, simplified form. In essence, intentionally teaching things in a 'theory light' way.

Greg then asked, "Does teaching in a 'theory light' way come at a cost?" To which he argued that yes it likely does – as we lose much of the depth, meaning and complex application of these theories. And in addition, students may become overconfident when using ethical arguments and theories that have been oversimplified. So how do we negotiate this conflict?

Greg said that we need to find a common ground to stand on with students, and that there is a need to simplify the complex theoretical underpinnings of ethics, so that even if oversimplified, student can still use, apply and consider ethical theory in medical practice. As such, we discussed how many students will use and apply FOUR general ethical principles: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice.

The rest of the session was spent deconstructing one of these principles - autonomy - and the complexities that underpin it (which are intentionally left unexplored with students). And while we only scratched the surface of how multifaceted, intricate and complicated this idea of autonomy really is, discussion revolved around things such as: free-will, factors that drive our actions, who has ultimate control over an individual's personal morality, is anything we do actually autonomous, and the idea that while patients may think they are choosing for themselves, their choices are likely based on a collection of past uncontrollable / unchosen factors...it really made us all think!

Greg helped to reground us with the explanation that at this point in their medical education, there is a need and a benefit in teaching certain things to our students in a 'theory light' way. But we must also consider that this comes with its own challenges – meaning our developing doctors may have an inflated confidence in their ability to ethically reason which is based on the over-simplified version they have been taught. So, while there weren't any easy answers to the questions posed by Greg, it was a great session that proved incredibly helpful in having us reflect on the challenges that surround the need to teach students about things in an abbreviated form in order to allow the information to be accessible.

Slides from the presentation can be found here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xf4d7pd1cs9kdfv/Greg%20Moorlock%20Feb%20MEIG%20Slides.pptx?dl=0>



Upcoming Events

Next meeting:

Wednesday 4th March, 2020

1300 - MTC 005/007

Professor Lesley Roberts

Topic: Flexing Leadership Styles for Education Excellence...Who do I need to be today?

Quote of the Month:

"It is this lack of connection to a concern with truth—this indifference to how things really are—that I regard as the essence of bullshit."

-Frankfurt

Research Article Spotlight:

How can we know that ethics education produces ethical doctors?

Campbell, Chin and Voo (2007). *Medical Teacher*, 29(5), 431-436.

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