Are Medical Students’ Views of an Ideal Physician Eroding? A Study on Perceived Qualities of a “Role Model” Doctor Before and After Housemanship and between Two Cohorts Five Years Apart

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Abstract

Introduction: This study aimed to examine the impact of housemanship and cohort effect on the perceptions of what constitutes a “role model physician” between 2 cohorts of medical students. Materials & Methods: Final year medical students of the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, from the classes of 2005 (pre- and post-housemanship) and class of 2009 (pre-housemanship) responded to an anonymous 25-statement questionnaire reflecting Fones et al’s 25-item characterisation of a “role model” doctor. Qualitative data was also collected on student’s perceived qualities of a role model doctor. Results: For the 2005 cohort pre- and post-housemanship, only 3 of the 25 items had increased in importance post-housemanship. However, when comparing the 2005 and 2009 cohorts pre-housemanship, the latter cohort placed significantly greater importance on 12 of the 25 items. Willingness to teach was identified via qualitative analysis as a new important quality of a role model doctor for medical students. Conclusion: The importance placed on characteristics of “role model” physicians were relatively unchanged by housemanship within the same cohort but increased with time between 2 cohorts 5 years apart. This suggests that professional standards of an “ideal” doctor expected and aspired to by medical students may not be eroding as feared by the medical profession and society.

Key words: Exemplar, Internship, Learning, Medical education, Teaching, Views