

Special Topics

T13.1**Challenges of Biomedical Ethics in Modern Medicine:
From Training to Practice****13:15 Theatre 1****Is Medical Ethics a Teachable Subject?***Joynt GM**Department of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong*

Medical Ethics is a multifaceted subject, and potentially taught in many different ways. Teaching medical ethics through promoting reading on ethical issues, or delivering lectures may promote knowledge. Such didactically taught knowledge is usually enhanced by allowing students to attempt to resolve hypothetical cases in interactive guided sessions, thus promoting experiential knowledge. As learning medicine is fundamentally an apprenticeship, role modeling ethical behaviour is a potentially important teaching tool. This is particularly important, as our teaching outcome should be ethical behaviour. If we were to teach our students well in all the above ways, it seems reasonable to expect that they should be able to learn, and apply medical ethics to medical decision-making and develop appropriate ethical behaviour.

Unfortunately, some data from our students, and others, suggests that students do not become more ethical as they progress through medical school. Examining their ethical knowledge, by judging their moral decisions, leaves us concerned that we have taught poorly, or is it that despite good teaching, have they failed to learn? The results of our medical student answers to questions related to honesty and full disclosure (key ethically driven behaviours), suggest several conclusions. Firstly, their self reported views on honesty and full disclosure suggest their behaviour is less likely to be ethical as they progress through medical school. Secondly, while medical students can certainly be taught to recognise what generally acceptable moral decisions and actions are, their perceptions of appropriate moral behaviour of their teacher as a "role model" fall short of such generally acceptable moral decisions and actions. This discrepancy between what they are taught, and what they learn through observation and experience as part of their apprenticeship may explain the apparent failure to teach medical ethics successfully.

While the reasons for apparent deterioration in some aspects of ethical decision-making behaviour in medical students during their training are no doubt complex, the failure of our "role models" to adequately "teach" ethical behaviour must be explored if we are to make ethics a consistently teachable subject.