

Medical ethics and the medical student: teaching medical ethics and the medical student

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of medical ethics to medical school students in Brazilian colleges is essential for the formation of a humanized and well-trained health professional. However, In Brazil, there are difficulties in the teaching and learning of medical ethics within the faculties. The objective of this study is to develop an integrative review of 10 articles published between 2008 and 2020. By analyzing these articles, it was possible to verify that, despite a certain improvement in teaching over the last few years; the teaching in medical schools in Brazil is still outdated, requiring a long way to achieve an ideal level of education in ethics, bioethics, medical confidentiality, doctor-patient relationship and humanity. Moreover, the article emphasizes the importance of humanitarian and deontological teaching throughout medical graduation. An improvement in Brazilian deontological education would result in long-term benefits for Brazilian medicine.

Keywords: Students; Ethics; Education Medical Undergraduate; Medicine.

RESUMO

Ética médica e o estudante de medicina: o ensino da ética médica e o estudante de medicina

O ensino da ética médica para estudantes do curso de Medicina nas faculdades brasileiras é de fundamental importância para a formação de um profissional de saúde humano e capacitado. No Brasil, há dificuldades em relação ao ensino e à aprendizagem da ética médica dentro das faculdades, objetivo deste estudo, que consiste em uma revisão integrativa de dez artigos selecionados entre os anos de 2008 e 2020. A partir dessa análise, é possível verificar que, apesar de certa melhora ao longo dos últimos anos, o ensino da ética médica ainda é defasado nas faculdades de medicina do Brasil e há um longo caminho a ser percorrido até alcançar um nível ideal de educação em ética, bioética, sigilo médico, relação médico-paciente e humanidade. Além disso, é de extrema importância um ensino humanitário e deontológico ao longo da graduação em Medicina. A partir de uma melhoria na educação deontológica brasileira, será possível obter longos benefícios para o futuro da medicina no país.

Palavras-chave: Estudante; Ética; Educação de Graduação em Medicina; Medicina.

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Introduction

The teaching of medical ethics at graduation is of fundamental importance for the human formation of the future physician, in order to build its bases in the doctor-patient relationship. For this reason, the teaching of deontology is mandatory in medical schools in Brazil.¹

The teaching of ethics and bioethics in medical education is relevant because its main objectives are to recognize the ethical and humanistic aspects of the medical profession; affirm individual and professional moral precepts; know, in general, philosophy, sociology and law; and apply this knowledge in a clinical context, which can be useful in assessing human clinical needs. This allows the student to develop moral skills and resolve ethical dilemmas within the context of their profession.²

However, there is a lack of structuring and organization of the teaching of medical ethics and bioethics in the medical schools of Brazil.¹ In addition, a single national code of ethics was created in the country only in 2018, with the publication of the Code of Ethics of Medical Students (CEEM), by the Federal Council of Medicine (CFM), in order to unify the measures in the national territory and organize the rights and duties of a medical student.³ With that, there may be prejudice to medical education in Brazil, since the learning of ethics in medical education goes beyond the teaching of illegal medical practices by the student, encompassing aspects such as the humanization of care for the future physician, who will absorb the principles and guidelines aimed at the citizen exercise of profession.⁴

Ethics is fundamental for the creation of a new doctor and, therefore, this study aims to analyze and discuss how the teaching and learning of medical ethics in medical schools in Brazil is, covering the difficulties faced by both the physician and the medical student in colleges in Brazil regarding the learning of the codes of ethics.

Methodology

This is an integrative literature review study, based on the CEEM published by the CFM and selected articles in the PubMed and SciELO databases, using the descriptors “Medical ethics” AND “Education” OR “Students” OR “Graduation” and filter to search for articles between the years 2008 and 2020. Twenty-one articles were found, ten of which were selected after excluding duplicates and articles whose content was not of interest to the work. The selected texts were read and analyzed in their entirety, in order to discuss the difficulties related to the teaching of medical ethics and the perception of medical students regarding the Code of Medical Ethics (CEM) and the Code of Ethics of Medical Students (CEEM).

Results

The articles analyzed were published between 2008 and 2020, being one from 2008, three from 2009, one from 2010, three from 2014, one from 2015 and one from 2020. Table 1 shows the ten articles selected for the review, containing the respective titles, authors, years of publication and abstracts.

TABLE 1 – ARTICLES

TITLE	AUTHOR(S) (YEAR)	ABSTRACT
Medical ethics and bioethics as requirements of the moral being: teaching humanitarian skills in medicine	Roberto Luiz d'Avila (2010) ⁵	The article presents a historical review of the morality associated with the ethical character in medicine. In the end, it emphasizes the need for training in humanitarian skills in future doctors.
Medical ethics and bioethics: the missing discipline in medical graduation	Nelson Grisard (2009) ⁶	The study covers the low hours devoted to teaching bioethics and the low level of knowledge of students regarding the importance of this subject. At the end of the article, it is possible to identify the positive change in the students' attitude after coming into contact with medical ethics.
Is it possible to teach medical ethics in a formal curricular course?	Roberto Luiz d'Avila (2009) ⁷	The article elucidates the entire practice of medical ethics, going from the Code of Medical Ethics (CEM), to why and how to teach it. "Empathy, respect for the dignity of the human being (their beliefs and values), knowledge of the principles that govern the practice of Medicine and its historical awareness of citizenship and, above all, love for the human being, alongside technical knowledge, are the minimum requirements for the granting of a medical degree". ⁷
Knowledge in medical ethics among students from Salvador	Barbosa et al. (2020) ⁸	Progressive knowledge about medical ethics was observed in accordance with the curricular component. However, constant deepening is necessary to support professional performance.
Code of Ethics of Medical Students: A Qualitative Analysis	Lisboa e Lins (2014) ⁹	Comparative study between the Code of Medical Ethics (CEM) and the Code of Ethics for Medical Students of the Federal District (CEEM-DF), elucidates the need to create and apply a CEEM in colleges. This action will allow "academic awareness in relation to the ethical positions adopted as students, contributing to the ethical-humanistic training of the future physician". ⁹
Secrecy and confidentiality in the doctor-patient relationship: conhecimento e opinião ética do estudante de medicina	Yamaki et al. (2014) ¹⁰	The study carried out with questionnaires to analyze the level of knowledge of students about medical confidentiality found most students with unsatisfactory knowledge of the subject. Believing that medical confidentiality is the basis of the doctor-patient relationship, this ethical act needs more focus.
Assessment of medical ethics knowledge of medical students	Godoy et al. (2014) ¹¹	The research investigated the knowledge of medical students about medical ethics taught only in one period of college. It was concluded that the subject should be applied continuously during the course, with a focus on internship.
Knowledge and interest in medical ethics and bioethics in medical graduation	Almeida et al. (2008) ¹²	The study reveals that both medical undergraduates and medical professors know the importance of medical ethics, even with low interest, updating and knowledge. They indicate the need for more studies on how to approach the topic.
The knowledge of students from the Faculty of Medicine of Marília (Famema) about professional responsibility and medical confidentiality	Mendonça et al. (2009) ¹³	The article elucidates the need for the effective introduction of medical ethics in the curriculum of Famema's medical students. This observation came through the result of a survey that found a lack of evolution in knowledge about medical confidentiality and professional responsibility in the various periods of college.
The humanization of undergraduate teaching in Medicine: the view of students	Rio e Sirino (2015) ¹⁴	The study presents qualitative research with medical students on the subject of humanization. It was noticed that many approach this concept to the doctor-patient relationship, however, it is still necessary to insert humanization in the student's daily life.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Discussion

The teaching of bioethics and medical ethics is extremely important in enabling the future physician to deal with daily dilemmas related to the profession. The CEM is a fundamental document to help professionals on their journey, with the creation and installation of a CEEM common to universities, an act that would contribute to the ethical-humanistic training of the future physician.⁹

Studies that present data analysis, with questionnaires, allow the identification of a pattern of improvement in knowledge about the topics of bioethics, medical confidentiality, doctor-patient relationship, among others, after the implementation of activities that reinforce the importance of medical ethics. In this regard, the importance of carrying out practical activities is highlighted⁷ as the student can understand the attitudes to be taken with everyday situations, different from inert theoretical activities.

By analyzing these documents, it was possible to identify that they all point to the need for improvements in the teaching of ethics. They are initiated into unsatisfactory situations and indicate a progression as students are taught. However, when comparing the articles from the year 2002 with the newest one dated 2020, there is a slight change. Previously, students did not show good levels of knowledge of the subject during the course⁶. After changes in the curriculum, students showed better rates over the years.⁸ This shows that the changes had a positive impact on the 18 years that separate the articles. Improvements are still needed, an issue exposed by the need to go deeper into the subject.⁸

Therefore, for medical ethics to be a practice properly evidenced in the medical scenario, changes are essential, whether in the increase of activities that insert the student in daily situations of bioethics with increased workload, in the training of the teaching staff, or in the implementation of new teaching techniques. In this way, it is possible to train physicians with a humanistic and ethical character in their professional routine.

Final considerations

Although there has been an improvement in the teaching of medical ethics to medical students in Brazilian colleges in recent years, especially with the recommendation by the CFM of its teaching throughout graduation and the creation of the CEEM in 2018, Brazilian medical education still it needs significant improvements in the structure of the teaching of deontology.

This cannot be neglected, and it is essential to better develop ethical and humane teaching in colleges, so that the future of Brazilian medicine can enjoy a long list of benefits provided by quality ethical teaching throughout the entire undergraduate course in Medicine for the future medical professional.

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