

Nurturing the Art of Professionalism in Japanese Medical Students at Okayama University Medical School

Mahmood S^{1*}, Obika M², Teshigawara S¹, Kawabata T¹ and Kataoka HU^{1,2}

¹Department of Primary Care and Medical Education, Okayama University Graduate School of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Okayama, Japan

²Okayama University Hospital, Center for Graduate Medical Education, Okayama, Japan

*Corresponding author: Sabina Mahmood, Department of Primary Care and Medical Education, Okayama University Graduate School of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Okayama, Japan, Tel: 81-86-2444150; E-mail: sabinazaheed@gmail.com

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Short Communication

In simple words, professionalism means the skill, good judgement and polite behavior expected from a trained person in order to do the job well, namely good conduct. The importance of professionalism is highly advocated in medical education and was first introduced to medical students in the United States [1,2]. Nevertheless, the actual definition and meaning of professionalism is yet to be clarified on a broader perspective [3-6]. In a nutshell, professionalism in doctors requires putting the interest of patients before their own. It is important for doctors to strike a proper balance between adopting science and technology skills and mastering the “Art of Healing”. As we live in an ever evolving, interactive society, training in social sciences and humanities, is very essential to uplift the spirit of teamwork for the overall betterment of patients. In many countries, teaching professionalism to medical students, also demand’s attention to traditional cultural and spiritual aspects, which are deeply embedded in students at the time of their enrollment into medical school. When designing and introducing professionalism courses into the medical curriculum, the content, timing and frequency of lectures, seminars and workshops need to be well integrated, to create a positive impact on the professional attitude of fresh medical graduates and create a new generation of highly intellectual, skillful and humanitarian doctors. Presently, many medical and dental schools around the world are adopting various methods of introducing professionalism into the curriculum, through lectures, student generated videos, and determining the students’ experiences and views on professionalism through questionnaires, web-based surveys, generating qualitative and quantitative analysis, and promoting professionalism, proactively [7-13].

Japan is a highly developed nation which is extremely advanced in technology and has ample resources to educate their medical students with State of the Art, medical training. From the Japanese patient’s point of view, being offered universal healthcare seems to be the answer to all their health problems, in comparison to developing nations which are medically under staffed, ill-funded, and still struggling to meet the demands of ailing patients. However, with the silvering of Japan a demographic shift is taking place with a sharp increase in elderly patients. Such a situation will require generalists and specialists to be highly apt in professionalism, in order to attend to patients, who need less medical interventions and a greater degree of compassion. In addition, with its ageing and declining population, the globalization of Japan is now in fast forward mode, with the influx of foreign students, foreign employees, and their families, rising sharply since the last decade, particularly from Asian countries. As is already known, the “art of healing” in many Asian cultures does not rely solely

upon sophisticated technology or advanced medical treatments. The importance of spiritual beliefs, family decisions and diverse healthcare approaches, play a big role in patient compliance. Therefore, in order to cater to the needs of foreign patients with deep cultural roots, and also work in harmony with foreign medical professionals, the face of Japanese medicine and medical education, needs thorough revision. Thus, future Japanese doctors will be required to have knowledge and understanding of various cultures and religion, and develop attitudes of openness, acceptance and respect, to deal with foreign nationals, in addition to clinical skills. Introducing professionalism training courses in the medical curriculum from early years, can create future role models of physicians, with a concrete understanding of professionalism and a diverse, global approach to medicine.

Presently, the concept of professionalism is still very new to the medical field in Japan and taught in very few medical institutions. At Keio University, though not as a part of the medical curriculum, professionalism was introduced to medical students through an “Early Exposure Program’ (EEP), as an optional subject, at the “White Coat Ceremony”, through medical interview training using standardized patients, and during other clinical training programs [14]. As one of the pioneers of medical professionalism in Japan, the Department of Primary Care and Medical Education at Okayama University School of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Sciences, has introduced an eight lecture orientation course on professionalism, for first year medical students. The course begins with an introduction to professionalism, followed by lectures on diverse concepts including biological and social gender differences. Next, students are given an opportunity to listen to experiences of patients and their families in encountering their disease, in addition to student narratives of their home visits to patient’s homes. The course then moves on to interactive sessions where students discuss about the competencies expected of physicians, while taking into consideration what is worthy of the medical profession. Finally near the completion of the professionalism course, students are encouraged to discuss and set goals in order to be a competent medical professional. To evaluate the outcome of this freshly integrated course, initially, the Penn State College of Medicine (PSCOM) Professionalism Questionnaire for Medical Students and Residents” was translated into Japanese from the original, with permission from the authors [15]. All students taking the professionalism course are required to fill in a pre and post course completion questionnaire, and results and observations will be reported after completion of the first-ever course. Preliminarily, first year residents were given a lecture on professionalism and before and after questionnaires revealed that, even after few hours of lectures and interactive sessions, the overall internal consistency of each element of professionalism in resident questionnaires improved and seemed to

have a positive impact on resident's attitude towards professionalism, with better understanding and improvement in outlook involving patient care. Therefore, in order to improve professional and ethical values in future doctors, it is very important to teach, evaluate and train medical students from their early years in medical school and integrate appropriate courses on professionalism in every medical school in Japan, taking into account traditional and ethical values which form the basis of all Japanese medical professionals and patients.

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