

**Editorial****BEYOND THE BOOKS: PRIORITIZING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN MEDICAL STUDENTS**

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The ever-evolving paradigms of medical education internationally have been defined by community requirements and global standardizations. Healthcare academia strides in the direction of evolving educational paradigms and professional excellence. In our country, the healthcare academia has witnessed an exponential increase in the institutions, introduction of integrated curricula and relevant faculty developments.<sup>1</sup>

Our institutes have an intake of students with very diverse backgrounds. The student diversity includes varied social backgrounds, geographical backdrop, and emotional developments.

However recently the healthcare landscape is defining a profile for the yield of doctors in the country. Universities and policy makers have realized the need for soft skills like critical thinking, professionalism, emotional intelligence & leadership.<sup>2</sup>

Patient doctor interaction is the point where all the professional training and societal expectations converge. For an effective patient doctor interaction, the inculcation of elements like professionalism and emotional intelligence is paramount. One of the cardinal features of a safe, professional doctor is emotional intelligence which needs to be categorically considered, defined, trained and assessed during undergraduate studies.<sup>3</sup>

Emotional Intelligence (EI) training is crucial for undergraduate medical students

for several compelling reasons. Firstly, medical practitioners often encounter emotionally charged situations, such as delivering difficult diagnoses or dealing with patients' emotional distress. Developing EI enables students to better understand and manage their own emotions, enhancing their ability to provide compassionate and patient-centered care. The healthcare services of Pakistan are fast tracking towards patient autonomy and patient centered approach. Considering such times when the patient can truly steer his/her own healthcare decisions, the use of emotional intelligence will enable the doctor to win the patient's trust.<sup>4,5</sup>

Furthermore, medical errors can have dire consequences. EI enhances self-awareness and self-regulation, reducing the likelihood of burnout and stress-related mistakes. It also encourages ethical decision-making, ensuring that students uphold the highest standards of professionalism and ethics in their practice. EI training fosters effective communication skills, a cornerstone of the medical profession. It equips students with the capacity to empathize, listen actively, and build trust with patients and colleagues, resulting in improved doctor-patient relationships and teamwork.<sup>6</sup>

The rationale of EI training empowering undergraduate medical students with essential skills to navigate the emotional complexities of healthcare, communicate effectively, and provide safe,

compassionate, and ethical care to patients, ultimately improving both patient outcomes and the well-being of future healthcare professionals.<sup>7</sup>

Just like any other profession, it has been established that emotional intelligence (EI) is a vital soft skill for doctors that profoundly impacts their effectiveness in patient care and professional success. Doctors with high EI possess a keen understanding of their emotions and those of their patients. This enables them to establish trust, show empathy, and communicate with sensitivity, leading to improved doctor-patient relationships and patient satisfaction.<sup>8</sup>

EI also helps doctors manage stress, cope with challenging situations, and prevent burnout, contributing to their overall well-being and long-term career satisfaction. It aids in conflict resolution, teamwork, and collaboration with colleagues, enhancing the quality of care in healthcare settings.<sup>9</sup>

In essence, EI equips doctors with the emotional and interpersonal skills necessary to provide patient-centered care, maintain their well-being, foster positive working relationships, and uphold the highest ethical standards in their medical practice. It is an indispensable tool that enhances the overall quality of healthcare delivery.<sup>10</sup>

Emotional Intelligence is divided into four major components of Self-Awareness, Self-Management (self-regulation and motivation), Social Awareness (empathy) and Relationship Management (social skills).<sup>11</sup>

Training undergraduate medical students in the four components of Emotional Intelligence (EI) should involve a combination of didactic instruction, experiential learning, and reflective exercises. All these four components should be individually and methodically handled for training purposes. For self-

awareness, the students should be encouraged to maintain an emotional journal for reflection of feelings about the patient doctor interaction.<sup>12</sup>

Medical professionals often face high levels of stress and burnout. EI skills like self-regulation and stress management will help students cope with the emotional demands of the profession, reducing the risk of burnout and improving mental health. For this, a more holistic approach may be adopted at our medical colleges for the development of self-regulation by organizing workshops. These workshops can range from stress management to conflict resolution techniques trainings.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, for relationship management, the cardinal move will be to formally introduce communication skills training. Effective communication is at the heart of medical practice. EI training shall enhance students' ability to listen actively, convey empathy, and communicate complex medical information in a way that patients can understand and trust. This should be structured in a manner of spiralling over the years, as it requires constant development.<sup>13</sup> Ethical decision-making scenarios should be placed in the curriculum to bring into ethical considerations of patient care. These scenarios for ethical decision-making will help students recognize and manage their emotions and biases, thus dealing with ethical dilemmas in patient care.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout these training methods, it's essential to provide feedback, encourage self-reflection, and promote continuous improvement in each component of EI. A holistic approach to EI training will prepare medical students to excel in patient care and interpersonal interactions throughout their careers.<sup>15</sup>

No teaching or training is worth its weight without assessments. Assessing the effectiveness of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

training in medical undergraduate students involves evaluating their abilities in various EI components and their application in clinical and professional settings. For this, certain techniques which individual medical colleges can consider adopting, based on their resources are Self-Assessment Surveys, Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs), 360-degree Feedback, Reflective Journals, simulation exercises and portfolio management. Ethical dilemma analysis is a very interesting adoptable technique. The students are presented with ethical dilemmas in patient care and evaluation of their decision-making process, considering both clinical knowledge and EI principles, is done.<sup>16</sup>

The affiliating Universities in Pakistan are in the process of developing, implementing and improving formal training in leadership, professionalism and ethics. EI training should also be an explicit part of the module which is spiral and revisited multiple times over 5 years. EI training will equip future healthcare professionals with the skills to provide more compassionate and patient-centered care. It will help them understand and respond to patients' emotions, fostering better doctor-patient relationships and improving overall healthcare outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

The action of the time is to incorporate EI into the medical undergraduate curriculum. It should be an ongoing process that is continually reinforced throughout a student's medical education through the spiral of soft skills development. Prioritizing EI will guarantee that future medical professionals to not only clinically competent but also emotionally and socially adept, for effective patient-doctor interactions.

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