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Professionalism in Residency Training: Is There a Generation Gap?

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Abstract

Background: Teaching and evaluating professionalism is part of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education's training requirements for postgraduate education. Defining what constitutes professional behavior is the first step in this endeavor. Difficulty in teaching and evaluating professionalism may stem from generational differences between teachers and trainees in their definition of professional behavior. **Purpose:** We sought to explore the magnitude of generational differences by asking faculty and residents to evaluate behaviors along a continuum of professionalism. **Methods:** A questionnaire composed of 16 vignettes describing unprofessional behaviors was distributed to a sample of internal medicine trainees and faculty. For each specific behavior described, participants were asked to rate the severity of the infraction on a 4-point scale. **Results:** Within each group, responses were distributed across severity categories for most vignettes. There were no significant

differences in the responses of trainees versus faculty for any of the vignettes except two. Conclusion: There is little consensus for determining the severity of unprofessional behaviors among faculty and trainees at one urban university training program. However, this lack of consensus does not appear to have a generational basis. Attributing difficulties in teaching and assessing professionalism cannot be blamed on differences between the generations.

We thank the Internal Medicine housestaff and faculty at the University of Pittsburgh for filling out the survey and participating in our study. We also thank the former Internal Medicine Residency Program Director, Frank J. Kroboth, for his support and aid in distributing the survey.

Notes

^aBased on Fisher's Exact test.

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