Senior staff are ‘role models’ whether they like it or not: All doctors would benefit from a forum to reflect on practice

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Whilst we agree that forums for junior doctors to express their feelings without condemnation are vitally needed, we suggest that senior clinicians could benefit from these too.

In Cambridge, we run such forums – ‘Professional Practice Groups’ (PPGs), reflective small groups of 5-6 students. When facilitated well, these groups can be a transformative experience.

There are barriers to successfully implementing these groups. Students and supervisors often struggle to see the value in spending precious time reflecting on their thoughts and actions and there is often a dichotomy between what students discuss, and what they see in practice.

Whilst most clinicians behave appropriately, all have the occasional slip up and some display downright unprofessional behaviour. Analysis of our PPGs reveals that what students notice most is ‘doctors being unkind about patients and colleagues behind their backs’. Students feel unable to challenge this which leads to disillusionment and cynicism (1)

In order to implement such forums, their value needs to be seen by senior staff, and trainees encouraged to attend. Trainees should be given opportunities to discuss issues with seniors if they feel uncomfortable with anything they have seen – this relies heavily on seniors allowing themselves to be challenged.

Senior staff are ‘role models’, like it or not. Ensuring a culture of kindness is a powerful way to influence the professional practice of our doctors in training and taking time out of busy practice to reflect is crucial to this. These forums should be made available for all clinical staff – we need it

References

1) Wood D. Mens sana in corpore sano: student well-being and the development of resilience. Medical Education
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