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Relationship-centered care in Canadian medical education Les soins centrés sur la relation médecin-patient dans l'éducation médicale canadienne

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The relationship between medical educators and learners plays a pivotal role in moulding the personal and professional development of future physicians. It can also impact the dynamics within the healthcare team, and ultimately, patient care. As such, cultivating strong teacher-learner relationships, grounded in mutual trust and respect, is of utmost importance.

In Relationship-Centered Care (RCC), relationships, such as the ones occurring between healthcare practitioners, patients, medical learners, families, and communities, are considered the foundation of healthcare.^{1,2} In this

illustration, we characterize the principles of RCC in the context of the teacher-learner relationship in medical education. This illustration provides a representation of the type of trusting and respectful relationships that underlie a strong Canadian medical education and healthcare system.

Principle 1: Relationships in healthcare ought to include dimensions of personhood¹

Each teacher and learner is a distinct individual with a unique repertoire of experiences that ought to be acknowledged, respected, and celebrated to foster the interpersonal context within which learning occurs.² In this illustration, the learners (left) and teachers (right) are positioned at an equal level to illustrate the mutual respect they hold for each other, irrespective of the variation in experience, knowledge, and ethnic, religious, and cultural background.

Principle 2: Affect and emotion are important components of relationships in healthcare¹

Empathy and emotional support are critical in building strong relationships. In this illustration, the learners and teachers are separated by a stethoscope—a piece of medical equipment used for listening. It is through feedback and listening to each other that teachers and students come to identify each other's needs and determine how best to support one another.¹ When students feel heard and cared for by their mentors, their engagement in the learning process increases.³

Principle 3: Healthcare relationships occur in the context of reciprocal influence¹

Collaboration and interdependence between learners and teachers is critical in facilitating growth and learning for both parties.^{4,5} In this illustration, the background loosely depicts the ancient Chinese symbol of Yin and Yang—a symbol of interconnectedness, complementarity, and collaboration. The colour orange on the left half of the circle represents the newest generation of medical learners, who were gifted with an orange backpack from the Canadian Medical Association earlier this year. The right half of the circle, where the teachers are found, is sage—a colour representing wisdom and experience. However, there are orange elements on the teacher’s side of the circle, and sage elements on the students’ side, representing the fact that the ideas and thoughts of one party are influenced by the other.

Principle 4: Relationship-centered care has a moral foundation¹

Finally, in genuine relationships, both parties have a mutual interest and desire to serve each other.¹ Such moral commitment to each other is characteristic of a strong relationship. In the illustration, the divide between the teachers and learners has been blurred to represent the interconnectedness and moral commitment the two parties have to each other.

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