Chapter 16
Professional and Career Development of Medical Students

Sophia Chen
Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, USA

Christin Traba
 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6367-297X
Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, USA

Sangeeta Lamba
Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, USA

Maria Soto-Greene
Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the steps for professional and career development of medical students. While the two overlap, there are distinct differences in preparation of students for lifelong professional vs. career development. Professional development involves professional/social identity as well as professional competence. Authors describe curricular implementation to help students achieve professional competence, including specific tools to form professional/social identities and recognize unconscious biases, essential for personal growth, psychological health, and successful careers of future physicians. In parallel to professional development, career specific advising must start in Year 1 of medical school as well. This chapter delineates the differences in academic vs. career advising, advising versus counseling, and a stepwise approach by medical school year to help guide students to their ultimate career path exploring career specialties to choosing one and ultimately preparing for residency.

INTRODUCTION

Physicians have a unique professional identity as a "doctor". These qualities include a mission-driven spirit committed to helping others, the ability to inspire trust and the deep sense of responsibility that comes with the intense and personal relationships with patients. Training in medical school therefore does not only include mastery of medical knowledge but also developing this social and professional identity as well as finding a career fit in a discipline of practice. In addition, physicians have a professional responsibility to be lifelong learners in order to keep up with new discoveries so they may provide the best care to their patients. This chapter will address the evolution of the benchmarking and best practices for medical student professional and career development. Organizational structures and models that are recommended to support these activities and related accreditation standards will be discussed.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL STUDENTS

Background

Professional development as a doctor involves the formation of the professional/social identity and professional competence. Professional identity may be described as how individuals think of themselves in the profession. Social identity is how individuals think of themselves based on membership within social groups. This professional identity with its associated skills is essential for personal growth, psychological health, and a successful career as a future physician. Professional competence is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served (Epstein & Hundert, 2002). General considerations for medical student professional development under domains of professional competence, professional identity, and curricular implementations are described below.

Students often matriculate to medical school from college. They are familiar with their role as a student but may have never held a job, or held the responsibility for an organization's outcomes or received difficult or negative feedback. Therefore, it is critical that medical schools empower students to act and think as professionals and this involves providing students the tools to form their professional and social identity. The 5 key skills for a student's professional and social identity formation include 1) self- awareness and understanding unconscious biases, 2) accountability and professional standards, 3) teamwork and communication, 4) leadership skills, and 5) resilience.

Professional and Social Identity Formation

1. **Self- awareness and understanding unconscious bias**: It is important to provide students the tools to help them understand their social identity and become aware of their own biases. This will have an impact on the type of care they provide to patients as well as help them determine the type of physician they aspire to become.
   Biases are part of the pattern recognition processes and brain short cuts that are meant to increase efficiency and handle external information. These biases may be conscious (or explicit) and unconscious (or implicit). Conscious bias refers to a set of attitudes, beliefs and deliberate thoughts that an individual has against others as a result of a perceived threat and this type of bias is easier

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