

Medical Students Need a Global Perspective

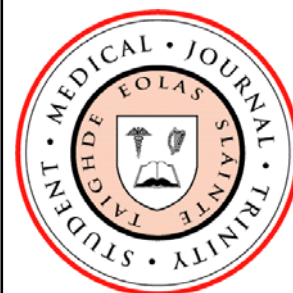
It is not possible to curtail medical training to a unique population thought to define the Irish nation, just as it is not ethical to favour healthcare to some and not others because of a lack of awareness and ability, and feelings of responsibility. We are responsible because we are tied to global issues. We are responsible because, for want or not, Irish healthcare is increasingly absorbed by globalisation. The Irish Ethos, and the national issues of Ethics, Economics, and Environment, each impose an influence on the nation's care of the health of its citizens, and each are fated to be influenced and altered under accelerating globalisation. Future Irish medical graduates need and ought to demand a broad medical foundation to cope with the changing climate and to enable them an involvement in global healthcare issues as Ireland expands its presence internationally.

Trade, information exchange, and human migration define nations and limit the impact of borders. Increasing interconnectedness over the past decade has brought many beautiful new faces to Ireland and has pluralized major centres such as Dublin. Patient populations are less homogenous than a generation ago, and health professionals in this country are increasingly encountering diseases, choosing management plans, and facing outcomes that would have been uncommon or even remote in the past. Population statistics for common illnesses are slowly changing to parallel this new demography, and rare diseases such as sickle cell anaemia, which are associated with certain groups more dramatically than others, are on the rise.

The increasing disintegration of national boundaries complicates procedures aimed at preventing the spread of illnesses, particularly the spread of infections like tuberculosis: a disease of serious concern to the Irish health system. It also mandates that Irish clinicians be alert to the social, political and economic issues of foreign nations. The reason is simple: Instability in one part of the world creates an unstable situation for the health of the whole. The migration of people across borders increases as regions of the world become volatile due to war or economic depravity. The compassion of the Irish people, and the growing Irish prosperity has led to Ireland increasingly being the end destination. Consequently Irish clinicians are encountering refugees and asylum seekers and their specific physical and psychiatric problems more often.

Clearly Ireland's welfare is tied through global interdependence to the instability of other countries. Therefore over the last decade, out of both a genuine expression of concern, increased prosperity, and a need to invest in the security of its own healthcare and more, Ireland has engaged with several disadvantaged countries at many levels. Irish clinicians may wish to participate in these programs for reasons of gaining personal satisfaction, appreciating diversity, challenging prejudices, and/or expanding skills and knowledge. They will need a sound understanding of the destination's health problems, epidemiology, medical practices, infrastructure, social structure, and political climate. To gain an early start, or indeed simply for the fact that doctors are seen as experts on all subjects related to health, it is necessary that future clinicians learn of the prevalent illnesses seen globally and to appreciate genetic, cultural and environmental differences amongst populations. To those clinicians who feel it is not necessary, then let them consider that medical ethics has always held that medicine has a duty to help those in need, no matter where they may be from and as can be seen from the articles throughout the journal students have benefited greatly from experiencing different cultures throughout the world.

The future mandates that culturally sensitive and tolerant physicians graduate from the nation's medical colleges. Medical students require an undergraduate training that exposes them to the traditions, lifestyle, and the truths of the economic and social realities of different nations. They must be trained to be compassionate and to empathise with peoples of all races and customs, as well as be trained technically to recognise and diagnose the common spectrum of diseases seen globally that are now presenting to hospitals in Ireland. It is not wise to teach healthcare issues solely from a national perspective, as it is not wise to remain ignorant of



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