



CAME Voice/Voix

Why a second edition?

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In 2009 we edited a book entitled “Teaching Medical Professionalism”. At the time, accreditation of both undergraduate and postgraduate programs required that professionalism be taught and assessed, and considerable experience had been gained in doing both. A second edition of the book is about to be published. One can legitimately ask the question “Why a second edition?” The answer lies in the complete title of the new edition: “Teaching Medical Professionalism: Supporting the Development of a Professional Identity”.

We and others have come to agree with Merton who, in his classic 1957 study of medical education, stated that it is the function of medical education to “transmit the culture of medicine and... to shape the novice into an effective practitioner of medicine, to give him the best available knowledge and skills, and to provide him with a professional identity so that he comes to think, act, and feel like a physician.” We now believe that the true objective of the teaching of medical professionalism is to assist and support learners in developing their own professional identities, and that professionalism in the curriculum is a means to an end, rather than the end itself. This is reflected in the rich literature on identity formation in medicine that has been published since the first edition appeared. Establishing professional identity formation as an educational objective depends heavily upon the concept of communities of practice. If medicine is viewed as a community of practice, learners move from legitimate peripheral participation in the community to being full members. As this occurs, they acquire the identity of a medical professional and accept the norms established by the community. These norms are based on what it means to be a professional, material that has served as the core content of the many established programs devoted to teaching professionalism. This approach represents an evolution in our thinking, and not a revolution, as it builds on experience gained in the teaching of professionalism.

The new edition, which includes contributions from many Canadian medical education scholars, provides a theoretical approach that can underpin programs whose objective is the support of professional identity formation, and it outlines appropriate educational theory, the nature of professional identity, socialization, role modelling, and reflection. It also provides advice on possible core content, case studies, as well as methods of instruction and assessment based on the experience of experts in the field. “Teaching Medical Professionalism: Supporting the Development of a Professional Identity” is published by Cambridge University Press.

See also: Merton RK. Some preliminaries to a sociology of medical education. In Merton, Reader, Kendall eds. The student physician: introductory studies in the sociology of medical education. Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ Press. 1957. P3-79