

# Character in Medical Education: Linking the Quadruple Aim of Health Care to the Medical College of Wisconsin's Triple Aim for Medical Education

Ryan Spellecy, Joseph Kerschner, Jose Franco, Cheryl Maurana, John Raymond

## Purpose

Several national associations have called for changes in medical education. There is general agreement that medical schools must be more student-focused to deliver higher-quality education. In addition, medical schools need to recognize the importance of character in training physicians and developing strategies for cultivating the character of the virtuous physician.

## Virtue Ethics and the Triple Aim

The Triple Aim for Medical Education focuses on character, competence, and caring. A modified virtue ethics offers the best foundation for understanding, teaching, and evaluating character in the Triple Aim.

- A. Virtue ethics offers a conception of medicine that is focused on the benefit of the sick, not profit or prestige.
- B. Aligning one's practice with the goal of medicine and seeing medicine as a calling or purpose can have a protective effect against burnout.
- C. Virtue ethics has an underlying commitment to excellence (arete).
- D. Virtue ethics also has an underlying commitment to stability of character (hexis) that can be leveraged to inculcate a desire to be an excellent physician, which will include character.
- E. Virtue ethics can better explain concepts like caring than other action-guiding approaches such as utilitarianism, principlism, or deontology.



## Character or Virtue?

- Virtue is an established concept
- Virtue has religious connotations for some
- Character avoids religious connotations, yet functions as a substitute for virtue in the Triple Aim for Medical Education
- Character can avoid concerns of elitism in virtue, yet still encourage medical students to pursue excellence

## Defining Character

- Most attempts to define character are empirical or philosophical
- MedEdNext shapes and interprets empirical data via a modified virtue ethics framework to define character

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## Character Listening Sessions

The Kern Institute conducted eleven one-hour listening sessions with faculty, students, and staff.

Faculty	Staff	Students	Total
80	56	23	159

Question: What is character?



"It's who you are when no one is looking." (E)



"Doing the right thing when it's hard or you are under stress." (D)



"What's motivating our students to be doctors and help in their communities? How do we keep that?" (A) (D)



"To develop character, you need to have mentors in your life, someone to emulate."



"We should see improvement over 8 years. All are works in progress; students don't 'arrive'."



"...strength of character when making mistakes or are having trouble." (D)



"Character is deep and enduring, and is developed in childhood." (D)



"...doing the right thing for the right reasons." (E)