

Institute of Medical Ethics

Fourth Conference on Medical Ethics and Law - Assessment in light of the new core content of learning Friday 5 February 2010, BMA House, London

The third IME conference, held in 2009, focussed on how the Consensus Statement 1998 should be updated and what topics should be included in a new 'core curriculum'. Following that conference, delegates and other stakeholders were invited to participate in a web-based consultation on the core curriculum. Working with the responses the Steering Group then, through a process of reiteration, produced a new core content of learning, expressed in the form of learning outcomes for 11 key themes. This document was published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* in January 2010 and a copy sent to all delegates prior to this conference. (G M Stirrat, C Johnston, R Gillon, et al Medical ethics and law for doctors of tomorrow: the 1998 Consensus Statement updated, *J Med Ethics* 2010 36: 55-60

The aim of the Fourth conference on Medical Ethics and Law was to promulgate and discuss the new core content of learning with particular focus on assessment.

Over 100 delegates attended with a wide spread of involvement in medical ethics and law, including the General Medical Council and the Medical Protection Society. We welcomed visitors from Singapore and Tokyo. The IME was pleased that, given the important aim of disseminating the core content of learning, all but four medical schools were represented. Twelve students attended 10 of whom were supported by a bursary awarded by the IME.

Sincere thanks are due to the BMA conference office for organising the event.

Morning Session

The morning session was chaired by Professor Raanan Gillon, Chairman of the Institute of Medical Ethics. He introduced the theme of the conference and presented the key note speaker, Baroness Julia Neuberger, who gave the second Lewis W. Headley Public lecture: '*Humanity and dignity in the practice and teaching of medicine*'. Baroness Neuberger spoke eloquently and passionately about the importance of walking side by side with the patient and truly understanding the patient narrative. She explained her experience as a Fulbright Scholar at Harvard where medical students were required to live with families where a member suffered from a chronic disease, with the aim of understanding the real ramifications of long term illness. This was a challenging address which engaged the audience and left us to wonder whether this experience could/should this be part of medical training in the UK. (Baroness Neuberger appeared on Start the Week 7th March 2010 discussing how society treats its most vulnerable members.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/starttheweek_20050307.shtml)

Dr Angela Fenwick, Senior Lecturer in Medical Ethics and Education, University of Southampton and Chair of the IME sub-group on Assessment then spoke about '*Assessment and the new core content of learning*'. She discussed different forms of assessment of medical ethics and law, their pros and cons, and gave examples using two themes of the new core content of learning. She provided reassurance that it is not possible to assess everything that is taught and that we can afford to be creative in our assessment tools. She also reflected that it may be helpful to consider assessment from the students' point of view. Angela's powerpoint presentation is available on the IME website (Education Project) <http://www.instituteofmedicalethics.org/>

A student perspective on the teaching and assessment of medical ethics and law was explored in the morning panel discussion, chaired by Carolyn Johnston from the IME Education Project and Assessment Working Group. The panel comprised four 4th year students -Yveline Ansaldi, Joseph Fitchett, Katie Honney and Nicholas Francis) and four junior doctors: Ruth Gailer, Hannah Leng Anna Romito and Fran Bell). They had all been recommended by members of the IME Steering Committee and had created their presentation by emails, and only met as a group on the morning of the conference. The panel gave a very powerful presentation focussing on their views of teaching and in particular assessment of medical ethics and law and suggestions for innovation.

At lunchtime Dr Al Buick and Jeremy Walker gave a demonstration of the Meducation website
<http://www.meducation.net/>

Afternoon Session

The afternoon session was chaired by Professor Gordon Stirrat, Chairman of the IME Education Project.

Dr Liz Anderson, Non-Clinical Teaching Fellow and Dr Simon Downer, Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Community-Based Medicine, University of Bristol gave a very interesting presentation on '*Assessment of professionalism: where are we going and what do we hope to achieve?*'. They raised the issue of what may be considered discordant or worrisome behaviours amongst medical students. This set up a discussion from the floor about what may be the appropriate reaction from those involved in teaching such students.

Workshops - sharing effective practice in assessment of Medical Ethics and Law and first steps in creating assessment tools

The delegates then separated into workshop groups with the aim of sharing effective practice and working together for one hour to produce a draft assessment tool for a learning outcome in the core content of learning. Prior to the conference delegates had been allocated a theme from the core content of learning¹. Each workshop group was asked to choose a learning outcome from the allocated theme to produce a draft of the *best* assessment tool for that learning outcome and, time permitting, marking criteria

¹ The following themes were chosen because their generic nature makes them more suitable for discussion among the multidisciplinary participants: Professionalism - 'Good Medical Practice', Patients - their values, narratives, rights and responsibilities, Informed decision making and valid consent/refusal, Capacity & Incapacity, Confidentiality, Justice and Public Health

and to suggest at what stage of the undergraduate curriculum the assessment would be most appropriate.

Plenary feedback

The rapporteur for each workshop group was given 3 minutes to feedback to the plenary session on the on the assessment tool created. Angela Fenwick's exhortation to be creative was certainly taken to heart and forms of assessment suggested included OCSEs, videotaped role play, portfolios etc. It was clear that assessment spanned more than one topic and learning outcome thus enabling real integration. These draft assessment tools will be available on the IME website, Education Project <http://www.instituteofmedicalethics.org/>

Summing up and looking forward – Gordon Stirrat

Gordon reminded us that this conference marked the beginning of phase 3 of the education project. Phase 1 (2007/8) had involved development of strategy and tactics; analysis of the issues and information gathering. In phase 2 (2009) the core content of learning was revised and the assessment working group was set up.

The strategic objectives of phase 3 are:

- To develop and make available to medical schools teaching and learning resources based on the revised core content of learning and appropriate assessment tools for the learning outcomes of the core content.
- To facilitate the further development of a community of scholars in medical ethics and law; regional groupings of ethics leads and greater involvement of clinicians and bio-medical scientists in ethics.
- If possible, to develop a direct e-learning facility in medical ethics and law for both students and doctors

Over the next few weeks the Assessment Working Group will consider and incorporate what has been learned from this conference into its ongoing work. The Steering Group will consider and act on the strategic objectives.

Last but not least Gordon thanked the speakers and panel members for their contributions, Sophie Armitage and her team from the BMA Conference Unit for helping, once more, to make the conference such a success.

Gordon Stirrat and Carolyn Johnston