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A Student-Initiated Elective in Medical Ethics: Innovations in Design and Institutionalization

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A Student-Initiated Elective in Medical Ethics: Innovations in Design and Institutionalization, Gaia Muallem, BA. UTHSC-H Medical School, Houston, TX, 77030. Chirag B Patel, MSE. UTHSC-H Medical School, Houston, TX, 77030. Eugene V Boisabuin, MD. UTHSC-H Medical School, Houston, TX, 77030.

Introduction: This study addresses how to best approach the instruction and evaluation of clinical ethics with preclinical medical students. Purpose: Three goals were anticipated: to incorporate student opinion into course design, analyze student feedback throughout the ethics elective series to determine the most effective teaching methods, and create a more effective course design for medical ethics education. Methods: All first- and second-year medical students and public health students in an academic medical center were invited to enroll in an 11-part elective course on “hot topics” in medical ethics. The course lasted from January to March of 2007, with seven topics presented as traditional lectures, and four as panel-based discussions. 98 medical students completed requirements for elective course credit and 83.6% of them completed post-talk surveys, on average. Students received learning objectives via email the day before each talk. These concepts were reinforced during the talk itself and then tested in content-based questions during the post-talk online survey. Follow-up consisted of post-talk surveys administered using BlackBoard online technology. Results: For all six standardized post-talk survey questions, panel discussions were shown to be of superior value to medical student respondents, compared to single lecturer presentations. Differences in response to two questions reached statistical significance between the two presentation styles: panel presenters effectively connected and communicated with the audience ($96.2 \pm 1.7\%$ vs. $84.5 \pm 11.1\%$ approval response rate, $p < 0.031$); and the information provided was meaningful and understandable ($94.6 \pm 1.3\%$ vs. $83.0 \pm 11.9\%$ approval response rate, $p < 0.042$). Conclusions: Pre-clinical medical students believe they would benefit from more interactive lectures that incorporate personalized case presentations in the form of panel discussions into their medical ethics curricula, compared to single lecturer, didactic presentations. Early student input concerning effective teaching modalities in elective or even required medical school course design might benefit both the students and faculty.