

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY FORUM

Leadership Training—What Can Medicine Learn from the Military?

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Commander Bonadonna, a military historian and ethicist with the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, discussed the ways in which the lessons of military experience might be applied to medicine, in the context of the military profession's "whole person" approach to leadership.

The goals of the military and medicine are at odds—taking life, when necessary, versus preserving life. Yet, the two professions are not so disparate. People are often drawn to medicine and the military for similar reasons—the immediacy of the challenge, the nobility of the cause. Like military officers, physicians could be termed "pragmatic scientists" who rely on technical knowledge (best practices; technology) combined with subjective judgment.

Physician and military leaders likewise share similar charges. For example, both must be effective administrators and motivators. As part of its leadership training, the military strives to develop the right skill set as well as the "right stuff"— a combination of integrity, dedication, and team ethic. Given that medicine has increasingly become a team endeavor, the comparisons between the two professions, especially concerning esprit de corps, are apt.