

Population Health Forums

Formerly Health Policy Forums

Empathy in Patient Care – Myth or Reality?

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This informative Forum began with definitions of *empathy* and *sympathy*, and the distinctions between the two. Factors that influence and enhance physician empathy were discussed. The Jefferson Scale of Empathy (JSE) was presented as an internationally recognized valid tool to measure the phenomenon. Research utilizing the scale was presented, and future areas of research were outlined.

Dr. Hojat, who has authored over 180 publications on the use of psychometric testing and medical education, began the Forum program by explaining that empathy is a phenomenon that can be defined operationally (as described by psychologist Carl Rogers) and measured quantitatively. The JSE is a 20-item

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Likert-scale questionnaire. Due to its proven validity and reliability to measure empathy in medical care, it has been used in 60 countries and 42 languages to answer numerous psychological and education questions as well as to evaluate the impact of empathy on clinical outcomes. Empathy tends to be higher in women and in physicians who select patient-oriented rather than technology- or procedure-oriented specialties. It is correlated with clinical competence, classmate perception of professional attributes, patient compliance and patient satisfaction.

Mr. Louis presented data from studies conducted at Jefferson and in Italy correlating physician empathy and clinical outcomes for

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patients with diabetes. Both published studies displayed robust data with large sample sizes. At Jefferson, higher physician empathy scores were associated with improved outpatient control of blood glucose and lipids. In Parma, Italy, higher physician empathy scores were correlated with fewer metabolic complications in hospitalized diabetic patients. ■

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To read the latest publication on this research visit: http://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2012/09000/The_Relationship_Between_Physician_Empathy_and_26.aspx

Grandon Workshop

A special additional session of the Population Health Forum for Grandon Society Members

Stefano Del Canale, MD, PhD

*Research Coordinator and Primary Care Physician
Coordinator of the Primary Care Team, Local Health Authority, Parma, Emilia-Romagna, Italy*

Dr. Del Canale joined the session live via Skype from Parma, Italy to discuss the role and cultural implications of empathy in the Italian Universal Health System.

Dr. Stefano Del Canale, research coordinator of the Parma, Italy primary care team and Dr. Vittorio Maio, Associate Professor of the Jefferson School of Population Health, relayed to the attendees the cultural expectations associated with empathy. In Italy's universal health care system, longstanding relationships are established between patients and their assigned primary care providers. Physician empathy for patients who are socially distressed, isolated or who are dying is viewed as a demonstration of the validity and effectiveness of the Italian health system.

This unique session concluded with a discussion of factors that teach empathy to medical students. Chief among these are service projects and an empathic physician role model.

In summary, the presenters provided an engaging discussion concerning the role of empathy in health care, its influences, cultural expectations and impact on clinical outcomes in diabetes. Further research ideas include identifying approaches to sustain empathy in health care providers and utilizing the JSE to identify a cutoff level at which empathy training is indicated.

Would you like to learn more about the Grandon Society? Visit: http://www.jefferson.edu/population_health/GrandonSociety.html