

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

PERSONAL VALUES OF FUTURE DOCTORS

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ABSTRACT

The aim: To analyse the value priorities of first-year medical students and outline areas of educational work to develop a system of professional values of future doctors who are able to work in circumstances of challenges of the time, as well as military conflicts.

Materials and methods: The method of questionnaires involving the students of Ternopil National Medical University from Ukraine and India was used, as well as the method of content analysis of students' creative work. At the final stage of the study, essays written by Ukrainian first-year students on the day of the beginning of the war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 were analysed.

Results: The desire to help people was the motive to enter a medical university for the majority of both Ukrainian and international students. Besides, Ukrainians identified civic values that are important in wartime: unity, national consciousness, struggle. In their opinion, the first day of the war determined the splash of anti-values: panic, fear, confusion. However, a similar study conducted ten days after the start of the war showed increase of confidence in victory, the levelling of negative emotions among Ukrainians. Therefore, the issue of the dynamics of values in wartime should be studied more.

Conclusions: Institutions of higher medical education should maintain a high intrinsic motivation of students in their altruistic striving to serve people, and improve the adaptation of first-year students, especially international ones. In wartime, it is necessary to intensify the educational work regarding ethical and spiritual development for strengthening the psychological well-being of students.

KEY WORDS: values; medical university; students; future doctors

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INTRODUCTION

The moral and legal basis for professional activities of health professionals is outlined in the International Code of Medical Ethics, which is developed on compliance with the principles of the Geneva Declaration that requires a physician to dedicate their life to serving humanity; conscientiously and with dignity perform their professional duty regardless of circumstances; take care of patients' health first and foremost [1]; to protect human life from its very beginning as the highest value [2].

The issue of the system of value orientations is especially urgent in extreme situations, and war as the highest level.

One of the fundamental principles for development of state policy in health care is the implementation and realization of universally recognized ethical and human values, respect for human beings, their dignity, equality, solidarity and professional ethics of employees. Among the principles of relevant state policy there are: humanistic orientation, ensuring the priority of universal human values over class, national, group or individual interests, increased medical and social protection of the most vulnerable population [3]. Their implementation is related, in particular to the bioethical context of health care, which reflects the eternal truths about the highest value and dignity of the person, spirituality as a guarantee of psychological well-being, moral responsibility of health professionals [4].

According to some experts [5], appropriate steps should

be taken in medical education to ensure the maintenance of health care reform at the present stage. Transformations should be based on the values of medical ethics and bioethics, which guarantee ethical safety of a person/patient and moral responsibility of a physician.

THE AIM

The aim of the study is to analyse the value priorities of first-year medical students from Ukraine and India. The tasks involve defining the factors that motivate students to study medicine, the personal features essential for doctors, and areas of educational work at a medical university, which should be supported to develop a system of professional values of future medical specialists capable of working in circumstances of challenges of the time, in particular military conflicts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method of questionnaire was used to study the value priorities of students. The participants of the survey, 2019/2020 academic year, were the first-year students from Ukraine and India studying at Ternopil National Medical University. The students filled in a questionnaire with open-ended questions about the motives to enter a medical university and the most important personal features neces-

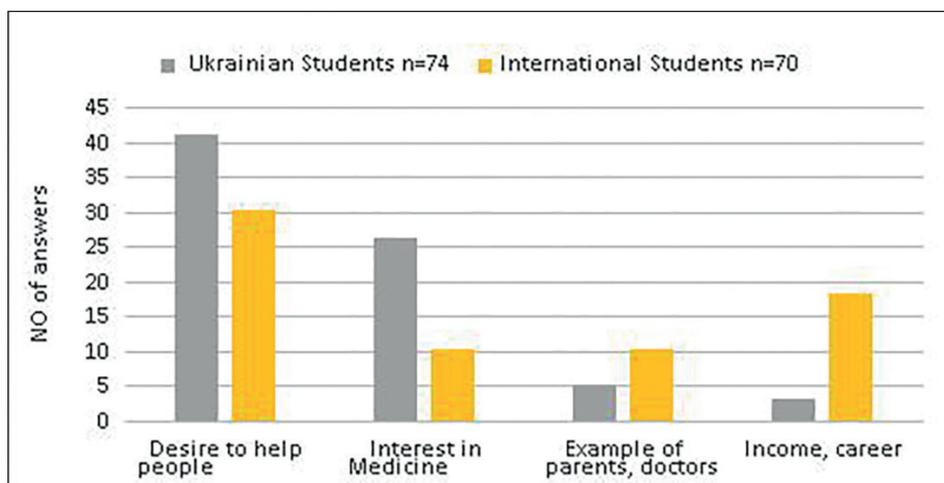


Fig. 1. Students' motives to enter a medical university

sary for a modern doctor. The answers were summarized, classified and presented in quantitative indicators in the MS Excel. To study the personal features of a student that were the most valued by the first-year students, the content of their essays was analysed, as this method allows tracing and considering the context of formulating the author's position. The essays written by students on the day of the beginning of the war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 were analysed as well.

RESULTS

According to the results of the survey, the internal and external factors that motivated first-year students to enter a medical university were defined. As the answers of boys and girls from both Ukraine and India did not differ significantly within their nationalities, we did not find gender differences in this part of the study, and compared the data only by nationality.

Therefore, such intrinsic motivation as striving to help people ("childhood dream", "desire to serve humanity", "I want to help those who need it") was the motive to enter a medical university for the majority of both Ukrainian and international students (41 respondents (53%) and 30 respondents (42%) respectively). Another intrinsic motivation of personal interest in medicine ("Striving to be able to solve health problems", "self-development in medicine", "always liked human biology"), was more typical for Ukrainians (26 respondents (34%) than for international students (10 respondents (14%)).

External factors also influenced the choice of the participants in our survey regarding studying at a medical university. According to the results of the study, such a motive as the parents' example ("older friends", "outstanding doctors", "doctors-heroes of films") was more prevalent among the international students (10 respondents (14%)) than among the Ukrainian (5 respondents (6%)). This may be due to the specific features of the civilized environment of students from India, which is characterized by Eastern collectivist culture, especially a high authority of the older generation, in contrast to the individualistic culture of the

Western world, which is obviously closer regarding the values of modern Ukrainian youth.

Moreover, the students believe that income and career ("formal employment prospects", "stable income", "career advance") are important motives for studying medicine. Also, some data differed significantly: only 3 Ukrainian respondents (3%) and as many as a quarter of international students (18 respondents (25%)) specified such a position in their questionnaires (Fig. 1). Obviously, these results were presented due to the general tendency of medicine perception in Ukraine, which is associated with the needs of comprehensive radical reforms, and is now only on the way of changes regarding providing medical professionals with comfortable working conditions, decent salary etc.

Finding out which personal features were the most valuable to modern students was our second task. Therefore, the results of content analysis of essays on "Modern first-year student" defined the values that students "search" in their peers taking into account gender differences. Thus, modern girls, describing the boys, distinguish the following personal features/characteristics: the search for meaning of life, friendship, love; stylishness, adroitness ("a guy who manages everything easily"); resoluteness; going into different sports; high level of gender culture; striving for financial independence, self-discipline, courage, sense of humour, erudition, kindness, amusingness.

According to the results of content analysis of girls' essays, a number of first-year students' negative personal features were defined (anti-values): carelessness, indifference, confusion, discontentment (often due to inability to adapt to new conditions). These personal features of the student cause their negative attitude to learning in general; often such a student is tactless and unethical, spends a lot of free time playing computer games, on social networks, etc.

The boys' essays about the personal features of modern first-year students are rather reminiscent of a kind of self-esteem. After all, they do not focus on the girls' characteristics in the image of modern first-year students, but write, in fact, about themselves. In their opinion, the positive personal features of the student are: mastering

new learning forms and methods (as a prerequisite for successful educational and cognitive activities); readiness for a new work and rest schedule; the ability to appreciate existing life experience and striving to expand it.

As we see, girls focus not only on the positive personal features of modern first-year students, but are also aware of their certain negative traits. At the same time, girls describe a special ideal of personality in a set of different social roles: boy, student, friend, colleague, person etc. All these positive personal features are a good basis for development of student's personality as a future doctor. The boys' essays show that at this stage of their lives the key concepts/questions/tasks are, first of all self-analysis, self-evaluation, self-improvement.

The next task was to study the views of modern first-year students on the personal values of a doctor. According to the survey results, erudition ("high level of intellectual development", "comprehensive and high-quality professional knowledge") was the most valuable personal feature of a modern doctor for Ukrainian respondents (35 girls (100%) and 40 boys (97%). Communicativeness ("effective communication", "social work skills", "preventive and educational skills") was the second according to the answers of the representatives of both genders (30 girls (85%) and 27 boys (65%). The survey results regarding striving for continuous self-improvement of a doctor (15 (42%) and 20 (48%), respectively) was almost equal in quantity among girls and boys. This feature was the third among Ukrainian respondents.

Further, the views of the interviewed female and male students rather differed. Kindness as a necessary feature of a doctor was valued by girls (26 respondents (74%) rather than boys (10 respondents (24%). Girls (20 respondents (57%) were also more convinced that a doctor should be altruistic (selfless, unselfish) than boys (15 respondents (36%). Instead, stress resistance as a doctor's personal feature was more valued by boys (24 respondents (58%) than by girls (19 respondents (54%). Typically, stress resistance and morality are equally valued by the interviewed girls. This points to the fact that these features are interrelated: the higher the level of morality of a person, the stronger they are spiritually, and, consequently, more stress-resistant. At the same time, girls value morality as a doctor's trait more (19 respondents (54%) than boys (13 respondents (31%).

The results of the survey showed that the creativity ("flexible thinking", "individual approach", "creative clinical thinking", "willingness to work in unusual conditions") as a doctor's personal feature is more important for boys (17 respondents (41%) than for girls (10 respondents (28%). At the same time, twice as many girls compare to boys (10 respondents (28%) versus 5 respondents (12%) noted responsibility as a valuable personal feature of a doctor. Also, girls more often than boys mentioned in the questionnaires that the doctor should be sympathetic (5 respondents (14%) versus 2 respondents (4%) (Fig. 2).

The results of the survey among international students showed that in their opinion the communication was the most valuable personal feature of a doctor (28 girls (90%) and 36 boys (92%). Erudition was the second; it was more valued by girls (24 respondents (77%) than by boys (23 respondents

(58%). Stress resistance was the third; more boys (25 respondents (64%) than girls (15 respondents (48%) considered it to be a necessary personal feature of a doctor. It is important that both Ukrainian and international boys valued stress resistance more than girls. This can be explained by the boys' desire for such an "ideal doctor" that is stable, strong, enduring not only physically but also morally. The great number of international students choosing communicativeness and stress resistance as the most important personal features of a doctor is associated with the need to adapt freshmen to life in a foreign country. These personal features contribute to establishment of contacts, effective interaction and psychological wellbeing of both students and doctors.

In the choice of kindness as a doctor's trait, a significant gender differences were evidenced: in questionnaires it was mentioned by almost all the girls (30 respondents (96%) and only a few boys (4 respondents (10%). According to the survey results, more girls valued some other personal features than boys: altruism (18 respondents (58%) versus 9 respondents (23%), morality (19 respondents (61%) versus 20 respondents (51%), responsibility (11 respondents (35%) versus 7 respondents (17%), sympathy (7 respondents (22%) versus 6 respondents (15%) respectively). Thus, the personal features associated with the emotionality and morality are particularly valuable for international female students that is quite consistent with the image of an ideal kind-hearted compassionate doctor.

It was established that international boys value such a trait of a doctor as the striving for continuous self-improvement more than girls (12 respondents (30%) versus 5 respondents (16%, respectively). The respondents of both genders valued creativity as an important personal feature of a doctor equally: 13 girls (41%) and 16 boys (41%) mentioned it in their questionnaires (Fig. 3).

In addition, harmony as a necessary trait of a doctor was mentioned by 2 girls (6%) (meaning "the ability to rational and balanced time management regarding work and family"). In the questionnaires of Ukrainian respondents there were no such a position, that on the one hand emphasized the greater need of girls from India to develop the skills of creation a "wheel of balance", and on the other hand pointed to the national features of social and cultural development of Ukrainian society, as ensuring harmony between family and professional responsibilities was already common for Ukrainian women, including female doctors.

On the final stages of research, it was supplemented with the results of content analysis of students' essays written by Ukrainian students of Ternopil National Medical University on February 24, 2022, the day the war in the country began. Thus, certain features of the value component represented in students' essays were identified. Firstly, the value context of the essay expressed the ethnogenetic kinship of young Ukrainians with their homeland ("native land", "the land, where my ancestors lived from time immemorial", "the land, where I took my first steps and developed my talents"). Secondly, the students mentioned a number of national and civic values, which became topical with beginning of the war, and were the key to victory and peace: unity, national consciousness, freedom, rights of the

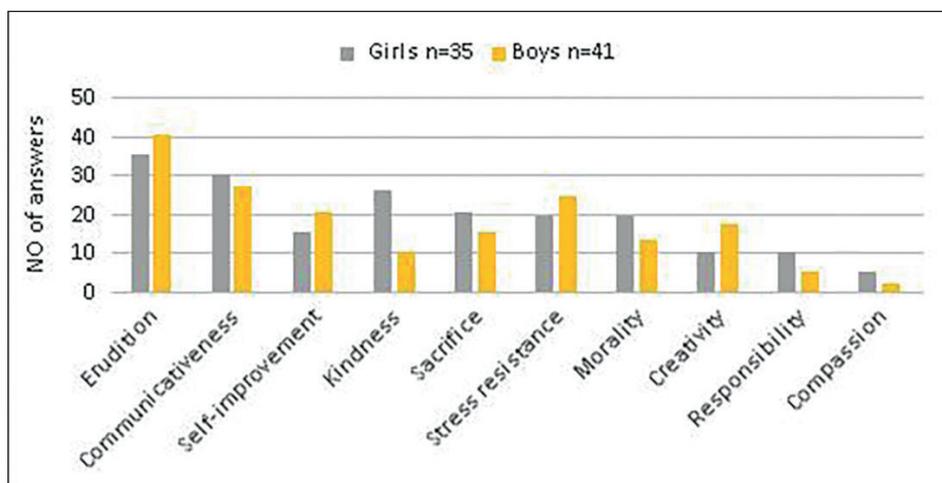


Fig. 2. The most valuable personal features of a doctor (according to Ukrainian students)

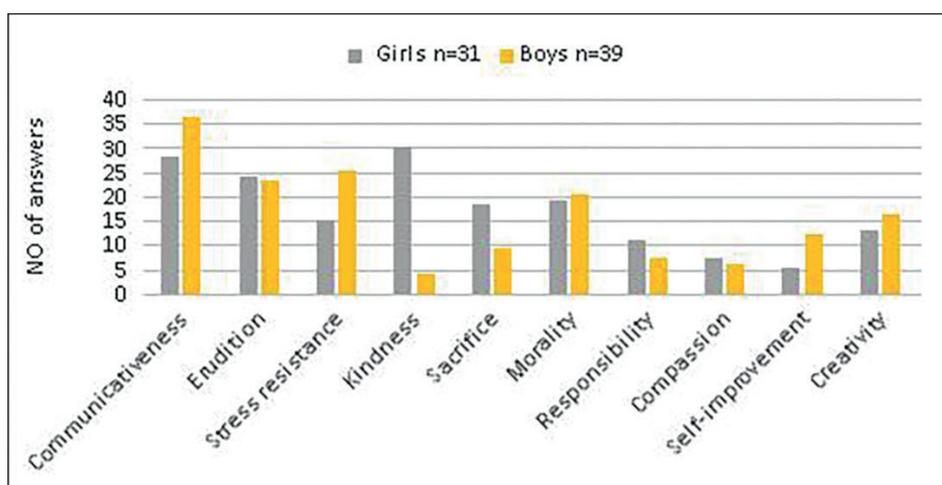


Fig. 3. The most valuable personal features of a doctor (according to international students)

nation, struggle (for the defense of state independence), love (for the native country), native language, native culture. It is important that students comprehend the essence, success and victory of Ukraine in personal dimension – through self-presentation, efforts and achievements of each citizen, in the unity of the nation. Thirdly, the students distinguished the spiritual aspect in the value perception of modern military realities. According to the results of content analysis, the relevant values were defined: God, faith, hope, love, prayer, morality.

The first-year students emphasized that spirituality of society had an extremely important impact (“faith is the only thing that can save us”) in warfare. Two problems are focused within this issue. First: the nation’s relationship with God, which, according to the students, needs changes (“people mostly have forgotten about God”, “only God can save the country from such a disaster”). Second: interpersonal attitudes of Ukrainians, which also should be changed, because they reflect anti-values (“Ukrainians are not very fond of each other”, “often people are indifferent, selfish”).

In fact, the students stated that the beginning of the war determined the splash of a number of anti-values: panic (not self-control), fear (not courage), despair (not hope), confusion (not confidence). Thus, the first-year students, who are aware of this problem, can be the initiators and creators of changes in spreading spiritual values in the society

experiencing war and needs a profound moral and spiritual revival. It is interesting that a similar study conducted ten days after the beginning of the war showed an increase of confidence in victory and the levelling of negative emotions. It is obvious that the issue of the dynamics of values in wartime should be studied more comprehensively.

DISCUSSION

The issue of values inherent in foreign countries is topical. O.V. Vakhrina published an article “The views of Polish scientists on the concept of “value”. It is important that the meaning of the concept of “value” is “objects of symbolic or non-symbolic nature, usually desirable in a society; as life and normative judgments accepted in society, and as views concerning the system of values and recognized norms desired for a particular society” [6]. Analyzing the Polish researchers, the author emphasizes the values as an element of individual and collective culture, behavioural factor, standards, criteria for the desired, which “regulate actions, judgments, choice, evaluations, arguments, rationalization, determining the worldview and the core of motivation for life activity” [6]. Thus, the philosophical aspects of the problem of values in scientific discourse contribute to understanding the subject of our study and interpretation of its results.

The issue of our study is urgent due to the fact that the new generation of students, Generation Z (born from 1995 to 2010), is the majority of medical university students, who will join the workforce in a few years [7; 8].

The research results on the motivation of prospective medical students complement current researches, in particular, by B.M. Holzer et al. Thus, Swiss Generation Z students striving to become doctors, just like the participants the presented survey, show high intrinsic motivation, altruism and willingness to take on professional responsibilities sharing many values with previous generations. At the same time, future students of medical university, as a rule, have a more expressed intrinsic motivation than students striving to study other fields of knowledge.

According to B.M. Holzer, O. Ramuz et al., high level of altruism and aspects of altruistic motives, such as “significant efforts” as the most important factor in choosing medical profession and personal striving to “help and heal people” support high intrinsic motivation of students, future doctors [8]. Thus, the study results confirm the thesis that the intention to help people is a very strong motivation of young people to study Medicine [9].

It is established that endogenous motives predominate in the motivation of Ukrainian students to study medicine, while among the international students, endogenous and exogenous motives are quite equal. When compare the results of the study presented and the studies conducted by T.I. Horpinich [10], A.V. Vykhreshch et al. [11], and B.M. Holzer et al. [8], it is obvious that in Ukrainians and Hindus the desire to help people is the primary, and the interest in Medicine (Ukrainians), the income and career (Hindus) is the second. The Swiss show the interest in the field to be the first, income – the second, then the work safety... At the same time, Swiss students striving to study Medicine rated “significant efforts” as important as “work safety” and more important than “income”.

The study results complement the researches on various aspects, directions of formation of the system of doctors’ professional features. Thus, realization of values of “continuous self-development” and “communication” in the context of higher medical education and beyond it reflects the tendency of coaching [12; 13]. It is important that coaches value interaction with their colleagues-coaches for partnership and support, the chance to share their knowledge, and the opportunity of professional development and personal development as a physician and teacher [14]. The study results on communication and social activity as the prior professional values of future doctors complement previous scientific statements about the importance of social learning for medical professionals [15; 16; 17]. In this regard, the research by J. A. Deane & G. Clunie are thought-provoking regarding studying the effectiveness of social networks in the context of professional communication of healthcare professionals. According to the authors, most members of the group joined on Facebook to communicate (88%) and support peers in academic professional affairs (82%) [18].

Interpreting the erudition and quality of medical services as professional features of future doctors, it should be noted that the success of cost-conscious health care depends to some extent

on how it is understood and approved by doctors and future physicians [19; 20]. Thus, most respondents in the United States believe that doctors are responsible for reducing health care costs while contributing to patient well-being. For their part, the teachers of medical universities should help students acquire the knowledge and develop skills necessary for fulfilling this important role [21]. These measures may have a positive impact on the process of improving health care, and develop students’ knowledge/skills in clinical and system sciences [21; 22].

CONCLUSIONS

Academic codes of values developed at specific universities require further approval, generalization and further scientific substantiation. As a result, this idea can develop into a “European Charter for the Values of University Education”. The institutions of higher medical education, health care, state and local authorities must support and develop high intrinsic motivation of medical students in their altruistic striving to serve people. In the context of educational work, this is a positive example of teachers, providing adequate learning environment, high-quality training of social sciences, ethical subjects.

It is necessary to intensify the work of student groups curators, departments of medical universities in order to improve adaptation of first-year students to the new environment and life (which may be one of the factors in the development of their negative personal features and/or stressful conditions). It is necessary to strengthen the interactive educational technologies in the learning process, as well as implementation of social projects with the participation of medical students to develop future doctors’ communication and social work skills.

In wartime, it is necessary to intensify the educational work regarding ethical and spiritual development for strengthening the psychological well-being of students. Moreover, the war in Ukraine necessitates further study of ways to modernize the training of future doctors. The danger is increasing, the significance of psychological factors is increasing, the content, forms and methods of teaching should be revised. To overcome the post-traumatic syndrome of doctors and patients the coordinated efforts of academics and practitioners are urgent, as well as innovative high-quality systematic research.

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Conflict of interest:

The Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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