

The Need for Medical Ethics Education in Family Medicine Training

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Professional and accreditation organizations have endorsed medical ethics as a fundamental component of education for family medicine trainees. Yet various obstacles combine to work against the continuation of formal medical ethics education beyond medical school and into residency training. This article reviews the current consensus on the scope and objectives of medical ethics education in the context of family medicine training. The need for, and outcomes of, medical ethics teaching are analyzed on the basis of the available evidence. Recent trends in medical education that potentially influence graduate medical ethics training are also discussed (specifically ethics training in medical schools and the priority given to training in professionalism). This review shows a strong evidence-based need to provide medical ethics education for family physicians in training, a need that is apparent on many levels. The current reliance on medical school ethics education and emphasis on professionalism does not answer this need. A well-constructed course in medical ethics for family medicine trainees can teach an array of competencies stipulated by professional and accreditation agencies as important in the practice of family medicine. Educators must strive to overcome barriers and provide formal medical ethics programs to better prepare family physicians for modern professional roles.

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