

Medical Students' Conception of Professionalism: The Impact of an Early Family Doctor Attachment



Dr Julie Chen^{1,2}, Dr Weng-Yee Chin^{1,2}, Ms Joyce PY Tsang¹
¹ Department of Family Medicine & Primary Care
² Institute of Medical and Health Sciences Education
The University of Hong Kong

Introduction

The goal of undergraduate medical education is to nurture the development of doctors with the professional attributes required for quality patient care.¹ A systematic review shows that early clinical contact helps students develop a professional identity.² Also, early patient interaction with clinician-led small groups results in broader, more complex understanding of professionalism.³ Family Medicine has strong sociologic and humanistic focus with volume and diversity of patients which helps develop respect and understanding.⁴ Therefore, "Becoming a Doctor: Professionalism in Practice" (PiP), a 3-year longitudinal programme, was first launched in September 2012 for medical students in the new undergraduate curriculum in a university in Hong Kong, where they attach to a community family doctor in the first three years of study. The aim of this study was to investigate medical students' conception of professionalism after the first year of PiP programme.

Professionalism in Practice Programme (PiP)

- Aim to facilitate positive professional attitudes and behaviours and to encourage students to **explore their own ideas of professionalism**
- Longitudinal, anchored by **attachment to the same family doctor** over 3 years, supported by small group discussion, workshop, and reflective writing
- Provide **experiential learning** in family practice setting, **role modeling**, and **feedback** from tutor

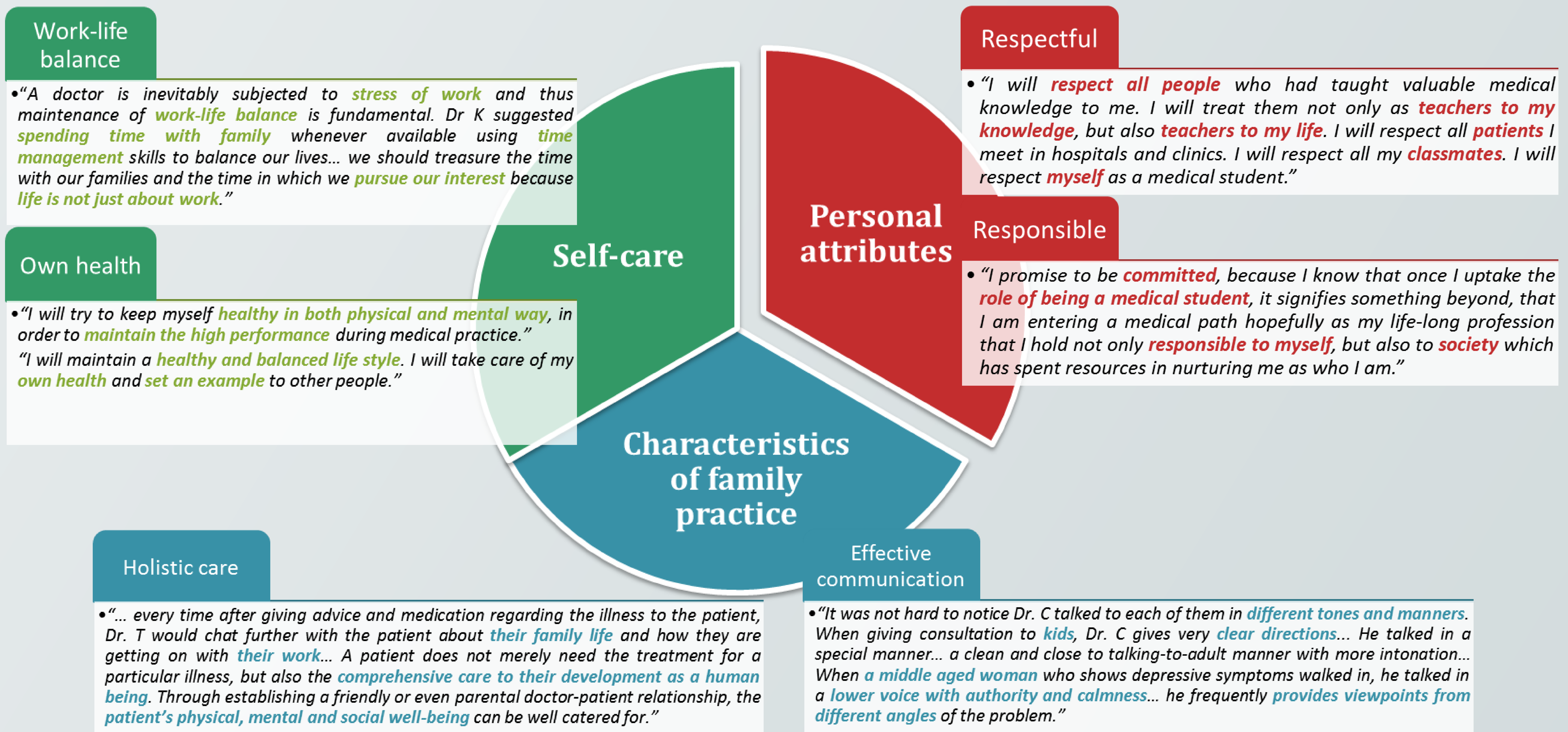


Methods

This qualitative study was carried out from October 2012 to October 2013. All 210 Year 1 MBBS students at the LKS Faculty of Medicine, HKU, were invited to participate. Qualitative data was obtained from (1) written questionnaire survey, (2) student written assignments including a reflective writing on professionalism in the family doctor attachment and a personal oath about the tenets of professionalism, and (3) focus group interviews. Thematic analysis was done individually by investigators on transcribed data to identify and categorize emerged themes. The investigators met to carry out further refinement of themes with differences resolved by consensus.

Results

Professionalism was conceptualized in 3 main ways: (1) **Personal attributes**, (2) **Characteristics of family practice**, and (3) **Self-care**. Most frequent themes with quotes identified are as follows:



Discussion

Students' conception of professionalism showed some consistency with other proposed conceptual frameworks^{5,6}. The result also showed that students had considered the nature of family practice and doctor-patient relationship as professionalism.

Conclusion

Early attachment to family doctors is beneficial to students to help them begin to develop a personal conception of professionalism. Family doctors are in a powerful position to influence students attitudes towards family medicine, patient care, and what it means to be a doctor. With the promising first year experience, students can revisit and reflect on changes in attitudes and perceptions of professionalism in subsequent years of the PiP.

References

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