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A critical scoping review of the connections between social mission and medical school admissions: BEME Guide No. 47

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Review website

<http://bemecollaboration.org/Published+Reviews/>

Keywords

Social accountability; social mission; medical school admission; medical school selection; medical school recruitment; medical education

Headline conclusions

Social missions tend to focus either on access and equity issues for applicants from underrepresented populations or on the career choices of medical graduates and how they meet particular social needs (Ellaway et al. 2017). The connection between social missions and admissions is often implied but rarely considered or evaluated directly. There is an absence of empirical evidence exploring the impacts or implications of these connections, with calls for reform or programme descriptions far outweighing the number of papers based on empirical findings. Despite the move to adopt and pursue social missions in medical education, there remains little direct connection between these social missions and undergraduate medical admissions and even less evidence reflecting the efficacy or impacts of making this connection.

Background and context

Who we admit to medical school is a fundamental issue in medical education. Many medical schools have adopted a social mission (Mullan et al. 2010). It would seem important that the admissions processes of a medical school are aligned with the desired outcomes of its social mission. Given that there are many ways in which schools' social missions and their undergraduate medical admissions may not be well connected, we wanted to better understand the current landscape.

Review objectives

The review investigated how medical schools' social missions have been related to the recruitment and selection of students for their undergraduate medical programmes. More specifically, the review question was: How do the social missions of medical schools translate to their admissions policies and practices for undergraduate medical education, and how do their admission policies and practices contribute to their social missions?

Review methodology

Search Strategy: Medline (Ovid), PubMed, CINAHL, Medline (Embase), Web of Science, Eric, and Scopus databases were searched in October 2016.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: The review included studies with a focus on medical student selection or recruitment or admissions, and where a social mission was present either implicitly or explicitly were included. Additional inclusion criteria were any study design or outcome measure that were in English and studies that were published between 1970 and 2016. Title and abstract of a random selection of 90 papers were checked for relevance to the study to establish a common threshold for inclusion or exclusion of the remaining abstracts.

Data Extraction: Papers were allocated to the 5 team members for data extraction so that every paper was extracted by two individuals working independently and each paper extracted by both a PhD and an MD extractor. A pro forma online instrument was used for collecting extraction data.

Data Synthesis: Extracted data was synthesized using descriptive statistics for structured response questions and interpretive thematic analysis techniques for unstructured response questions. The latter involved line-by-line coding and iterative axial coding of all of the data extraction material, followed by each team member creating their own interpretive narratives, which were then merged through discussion and iterative writing to create high-level themes.

Implications for practice

The connections between admissions and social missions should be made more explicit, in policy, process, and scholarship. We need to move away from the prevalence of ideological manifestos and purely descriptive studies to explore the connections between admissions and social missions more empirically and systematically. The limiting factors on admissions and the pursuit of social missions should be more explicit. We need to better understand what does and does not work in connecting admissions to a social mission, and in what circumstances and why. Finally, we need to see more equity and inclusion in terms of the voices that are being heard in this discursive space.

References

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