AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO INTRODUCING COGNITIVE BIAS IN THE EARLY YEARS OF AN UNDERGRADUATE MEDICINE COURSE

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Statement of problem
The impact of cognitive bias on clinical decision-making is evident in the current literature. However the focus of the literature has been upon clinicians and early graduate experiences. There is little evidence available on developing the awareness of medical students using clinical examples early in their educational pathway prior to clinical placement. This paper describes the pilot of an interactive learning session developed by an academic with expertise in medical ethics for students in their second year of undergraduate medicine prior to being engaged in clinical placement.

Description of the intervention or program
An interactive learning session was developed and delivered to large group sessions of 160 students in the second year cohort of an undergraduate medicine course. The sessions aimed to introduce the students to cognitive bias in clinical decision-making, and to highlight the evidence from the literature identifying the types of cognitive bias that have been identified as the most prevalent in clinical practice. Addressing the most common cognitive biases was presented as a way of developing the practical intelligence that is part of exercising role virtues, such as medical beneficence, in clinical practice. Peer learning was a key aspect of the session with students engaged in small groups and sharing of learning to the entire cohort. Students were organised into small group teams and each team was asked to: (1) Identify a cognitive bias that the evidence indicates is common in a particular area of clinical practice; (2) Briefly illustrate this cognitive bias with a clinical case; and (3) Propose a potential de-biasing strategy to address that cognitive bias in this context.

Findings to date
The observations made by facilitators showed that students displayed a positive engagement with the curriculum content and a capacity to use critical thinking skills and explain cognitive biases and the ways they may be experienced. Students also demonstrated problem solving skills and some ability to consider strategies to ameliorate cognitive bias in clinical practice.

Lessons learned
Incorporating cognitive bias using clinical examples in the curriculum for the early years of an undergraduate medical course can be successfully achieved using teaching and learning approaches that engage students. The relevance of the content is readily appreciated by students and provides a scaffold for further learning in this area during clinical years of the course.

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