

Re: Stress in the Medical Profession and its Roots in Medical School

Omar Al-Habbal

إشارة إلى: الضغط النفسي في مهنة الطب وجذوره من
كليات الطب

عمر الحبال

Sir,

I am responding to Professor Lamki's Editorial in your August 2010 issue.¹ The article discusses the roots of stress among medical students, dealing especially with Omani medical students and their social backgrounds. He elucidates some social aspects and obligations that may impose more stress upon Omani students than those elsewhere in the world.

Professor Lamki's suggestion that certain social obligations in our part of the world impose extra stress and interfere with students' academic performance may, in my opinion, not be absolutely valid. Obligations such as going back home over weekends, attending weddings, exchanging family visits, etc. are well engrained in our society and the fabric of our family structure. I would like to challenge his assumption given my position as Assistant Dean, where I have first line contact with students, listening to their aches and pains and their academic and social problems. I personally believe that having family support is one of the most important factors for a student's academic excellence. In my experience, it is those students who live away from their families that are the ones who struggle most. In general, whether we like it or not, we live in a society where the family is a tight knit and interdependence is the core of our culture, unlike Western society where individualism is the essence. This is the essential and most important difference between Eastern and Western cultures although things may change with time of course, as societies change.

Professor Lamki's idea of having two medical schools far apart from each other and having students exchanged so that they are not living in the vicinity of their families may be a westernised view and may work in other parts of world, but not in Oman. I may refer also to my own personal experience as a medical student. I left home at the age of 17 and went to a medical school away from my home country. My success in secondary education was mainly due to the support and warmth that I had from my family. Tertiary education was traumatic, not in the sense of studying and making it academically, but in the sense of having a dramatic change from the protected living in the warmth and backup of the family to a socially exposed environment where I was left on my own, so to speak, to find my own way. It did have its advantages, as I found out later on in my life, but it did not help me personally during my tertiary education. Although from personal experience, I have no doubt that it reflects on the lives of many other students in this part of the world.

In short, having medical students away from their families may not be the answer to palliating stress. On the contrary, probably family is the one significant support that our students need most.

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References

1. Al-Lamki L. Stress in the Medical Profession and its roots in Medical School. SQU Med J 2010; 10:156-9.