

## EMPATHY AMONG DOCTORS - MEDICAL STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** "Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another"- Alfred Adler. As the quote implies, empathy is the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings and conditions from his or her point of view, rather than one's own. Empathy benefits social relationships. It is beneficial for patients and physicians.<sup>[1]</sup> Empathy is a crucial component of the patient-physician relationship and has been associated with improved patient outcomes in multiple studies.<sup>[2]</sup> It facilitates treatment and improves physical and psychosocial outcomes.<sup>[1]</sup> It is better to be more empathetic than being sympathetic in a situation. Empathy is an active connection. This study is about the perception of empathy of doctors among medical students. It is inevitable for a physician to be empathetic towards their patients. Nowadays patients seek more empathy from their doctors. It is associated with increased patient satisfaction, improved adherence to therapy decreased medical errors, fewer malpractice claims and better outcome. Reflective thinking among 71 medical students regarding their experiences with doctor as a patient was given as an activity. Only 2 of them opposed the fact that doctors should be empathetic, remaining 69 had a common idea about the need for being empathetic towards their patients. This activity underlines the need for empathy. **Objective:** The objective of our study is to reinforce the need for empathy among the budding physicians. **Method:** This study is a qualitative study among 1<sup>st</sup> MBBS students based on reflective thinking about their experience as patients. **Results:** Interpretation of the feedback reflected that the students as patients sought more empathy from the physicians. They have also suggested some characters that should be imbibed by a physician while treating a patient and some characters which a doctor should not possess. **Conclusion:** "Empathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself"- Mohsin Hamid. Empathy is perceived as one of the individual abilities that defines efficiency in medicine and as an essential condition for patient- centred care. Therefore, this study is an eye-opener for all medical professionals regarding empathy and patient care.

**KEYWORDS:** Empathy, Sympathy, Compassion, Medical students, reflective thinking.**INTRODUCTION**

It is "appropriate understanding of another person or simply the ability to understand and mirror patient's feelings adequately."<sup>[1]</sup> Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.<sup>[3]</sup> It is the recognition and understanding of a patient's fear, anxiety pain and worry.<sup>[3]</sup> It is the ability to understand patients feelings and facilitate a more accurate diagnoses and more caring treatment with kind nature to the patient.<sup>[3]</sup>

Communicating with patients is the most important task of a physician in professional practice. In this aspect, the ability to be empathetic is a crucial factor for successful

physician- patient communication.<sup>[2]</sup> Physician's empathy is beneficial for the patients.<sup>[1]</sup>

From the study, we understood that empathy of doctors towards patients keeps up their confidence level.

Though as physicians we understand the role of drugs in treating patients, we need to pay attention to the mind of patients. "The mind of the man is the man". Whether patients need drugs or not, adding a dose of empathy may be likely to reduce their pain and lower their anxiety and stress.<sup>[4]</sup> Empathy being an important aspect of clinical care, it should be inculcated in all medical professionals invariably.

**AIM**

To enable students understand the role of empathy through reflective thinking.

**OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of our study is to enhance empathy among doctors in order to make their treatment a holistic one. The duty of a doctor is not only prescribing drugs for the clinical signs of a disease but to cure the patient completely. This is achieved only by means of an empathetic relationship between doctors and patients.

**Table with details of qualities mentioned by students in their reflective thinking.**

Attitude to be imbibed by a doctor	Number of Students
Kindness	3
Politeness	3
Friendly behaviour	5
Positive communication	10
Humble attitude	4
Enthusiasm and smiling face	8
Proper diagnosis	6
Punctual and should explain the course of treatment	6

Attitude to be avoided	Number of students
Improper communication	6
Harsh behaviour towards the patients	6
Use of social medias while consulting a patient	8
Medical negligence	4

**DISCUSSION**

Students by their reflective thinking have mentioned 8 qualities [kindness, politeness, friendly behaviour, positive communication, humble attitude, enthusiasm and smiling face, proper diagnosis, punctual and should explain the course of treatment] that a doctor should imbibe. Out of these 8 qualities, majority of the students have suggested “positive communication” as the most important quality that a doctor should possess during the course of his treatment. Students have also mentioned 4 qualities [improper communication, harsh behaviour towards the patients, use of social medias while attending a patient, uncaring attitude] that a doctor should not possess during his interaction with patients. Out of these 4 qualities, “use of social medias while consulting a patient” is the quality which most of the students suggest that doctors should not possess during their interaction with patients. They seek an eye to eye contact with the patient.

**CONCLUSION**

From the study, we understood that empathy is an inevitable quality to be practised. The study tells us that when doctors communicated positively and provided reassuring messages to patients, they reported to be compliant with treatment.<sup>[3]</sup> This activity of reflective thinking helped students understand the need for empathy in their practice. We have decided to inculcate

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was based on reflective thinking. It was conducted among I M.B.B.S.[2017-2018] students of Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital. This study was approved by the institutional ethics committee.

**RESULTS**

Our study put forth some qualities that a doctor should possess to their patients and also describes some qualities which a doctor should not possess in professional practice.

the art of reflective thinking to enable practice of empathy among the budding physicians.

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