

**Title:** Understanding the Role of Near-peers in Influencing Professional Identity Formation in Undergraduate Medical Education: A mixed methods study

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## **MEDICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH**

*Background:* Professional identity formation (PIF) is influenced by interactions with patients, providers, peers, and classroom experiences.<sup>1</sup> Gaps exist in understanding how students incorporate these encounters into their professional identity.

*Objectives:* We aimed to characterize factors that influence PIF in undergraduate medical students.

*Methods/Design:* A sequential mixed methods study was conducted involving: (1) a cross-sectional survey of M1-M4 students to quantify the influence of patients, providers, peers and classes on PIF; and (2) semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews to elicit descriptions of experiences that influence PIF. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory assessed self-reported burnout. Transcripts were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's constant comparative method for thematic analysis. Responses were compared by school year.

*Results:* Quantitative surveys were completed by 259 students (RR=51%). Patients and providers strongly influenced PIF across all years. Peer influence rose each year of training (M1=49%, M2=61%, M3=67%, M4=80%,  $p<0.002$ ). Students with higher burnout were significantly less sensitive to patients ( $p=0.03$ ), providers ( $p=0.02$ ), and classes ( $p=0.002$ ) but not peer influences ( $p=0.33$ ). Qualitative data was collected from 37 students, yielding 236 responses over 863 recorded minutes. Providers Interactions: students were heavily influenced by observing providers interact with patients ( $n=38/74$ ), primarily identifying positive examples of professionalism and behaviors they intend to emulate. Patients: students

described one-on-one patient interactions (n=38/42); clerkship students used patient's responses as feedback and pre-clerkship students used patient interactions for trial and error. Peers: peers challenged students to raise personal standards and set individualized professionalism goals based on behavior of respected peers. Classes: students evaluated the professionalism of instructors and learned to work in groups.

*Conclusions:* PIF is shaped by emulating physicians and reflecting on one-on-one patient encounters. Burnout may desensitize students to these non-peer influences. Peers challenge students to rise to higher standards. Preclerkship students interact informally as classmates, while clerkship students identify as colleagues and create professional communities of practice.

*References:*

1. Wald HS. Professional Identity (Trans) Formation in Medical Education: Reflection, Relationship, Resilience. *Acad Med.* 2015;90(6):701-706.