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# Embracing Emotionality In Medical Education

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## Background:

When training, medical students encounter emotionally intense situations, which may be positive or negative, leading to an emotional reaction. Powerful emotions may be stimulated in both theory and practice by situations such as bearing witness to or learning about:

- Demonstrations of compassion or empathy
- Interactions with positive role models
- Personal achievements
- Suffering / pain
- Death / dying
- Lack of patient safety

## Emotional responses in medical education:

- Happiness
- Gratitude
- Admiration
- Shock
- Bewilderment / surprise
- Embarrassment / shame / unease / discomfort
- Sadness / pity
- Stress / tension
- Anger

## Impact of unresolved negative emotions on the mental health and wellbeing:

Unresolved, suppressed or unmanageable negative emotions can have significant impact upon mental health and wellbeing and may lead to:

- Rumination, lingering anger, fear, sadness
- Guilt, shame or feelings of self-doubt
- Lack of empathy and increased cynicism
- Increased risk of withdrawal and burnout

## How to reduce the effects of negative emotions on wellbeing and performance:

In medical education, the foundations are laid for management of emotional situations for future careers.

- Explicitly acknowledge the impact of emotions
- Teach emotional regulation techniques
- Reduce the stigma that can be associated with openly expressing emotion

## Power of embracing emotion:

- By creating psychologically safe learning environments coupled with explicit teaching of emotional regulation and grounding techniques, medical students will be better prepared for the complexities of medical education and practice.
- Acknowledging and embracing the presence of emotionality in medical education will support the development of compassionate, empathetic, patient centred practitioners.
- Avoiding the suppression of emotions and learning to recognise and will encourage self-awareness and the development of healthy coping strategies.
- This will lead to a sense of empowerment, recognising that although there are circumstances which are out of a person's individual control, they can remain in control of the emotional impact.
- Students and future doctors will not avoid emotionally challenging situations as they have developed robust and healthy coping strategies.

Figure 1: Lee, A. (2024) Image generated using Microsoft Designer from the prompt: two silhouetted outlines of doctors, one male and one female, hug in a swirling and repeating pattern in pale blue colour. Inside the doctors are interwoven cracks and tears.

## References

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