

TEACHING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY TO MEDICAL STUDENTS IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The COVID-19 pandemic quickly crossed boundaries and uncertainties, and sprouted unexpected changes at all levels, carrying unprecedented ethical and societal challenges. In an attempt to contain the spread of the virus the majority of the governments have temporarily closed schools and universities impacting more than 80% of students worldwide (UNESCO, 2020). In Portugal, medical schools were closed after 31 confirmed cases in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Mahase, 2020), and the teaching-learning process was promptly adjusted to remote synchronous and asynchronous classes combined with the increased use of technology for medical training (e.g., virtual simulation applications, virtual laboratories, and other digital resources), except the students in the final year, who proceed with regular medical traineeships at the hospital, as also observed in several countries (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Given the multiplicity of ethical and societal dilemmas and challenges carried out with the COVID-19 pandemic, the weight of academic integrity training and other humanistic perspectives become more relevant (Alsoufi et al., 2020). In this regard, since 2017, the Faculty of Medicine of University of Porto (FMUP) is offering an optional and semi-annual curricular unit on Academic Integrity to all medical students from 2nd to 5th academic years (6-year course), in addition to a mandatory curricular unit (CU) on Humanities in Medicine at the 1st academic year. In 2020, the singularity of the experienced global health crisis served as a motto to bring medical students into the discussion on emergent and controversial ethical questions.

This presentation aims to share a student-centered learning strategy adopted by a Portuguese medical school during the first wave of the COVID-19 pan-

demic. Valuable informative materials such as videos and flyers, and ethical reflections from students will be also presented and discussed.

Pseudoscience and retracted papers on SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 published in high impact journals (e.g., *The Lancet*, *New England Journal of Medicine*) (Retraction Watch, 2020), the need to readapt Ethical Codes to the new experienced scenarios concerning resource allocation and priority-setting (World Health Organization, 2020), the intensification of ethical abuses (e.g., shortage of basic goods, price inflation, xenophobia) (Kouvavas et al., 2020), the “infodemic”, the responsibility of media to more vulnerable people, the apprehension about COVID-19 deniers, and fake news (Mheidly and Fares, 2020; Schillinger et al., 2020; Su et al., 2021; van der Linden et al., 2020), were some of the course contents covered in classes. The updated course syllabus also attracted and encouraged the involvement of medical students ($n = 14$) in the production of informative materials for the general public. The final grade average of 17.2 out of 20.0 (SD = 1.9) denoted a relevant academic achievement score as a result of a multilevel assessment approach; the average score of a written essay on ethical reflections (50%) and a set of informative materials for the general public plus classroom participation (50%).

Despite all the adversities of distance learning this was a time of fruitful collaboration and discussion about the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on social norms. Our approach taking advantage of the pertinent ethical issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances may inspire others to adjust the teaching-learning processes in forthcoming unexpected events.

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