

Motivations to conduct research and burnout in medical education: some different viewpoints

Motivations pour la recherche et épuisement professionnel en éducation médicale : perspectives divergentes

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Dear Editors,

Box et al.¹ showed trainees with intrinsic motivation less often experience burnout and proposed ways educators might prevent burnout. I have different viewpoints. Can we greatly “modify” intrinsic motivation? If the “publish or perish” atmosphere (extrinsic motivation) causes burnout, how about stopping it? If the water is infected, find another source.

First, my top priority in medical education is to develop good clinicians, not researchers. I, a former department director, shared research ideas freely, yet many did no research: 53% wrote no paper after residency.² Still, all became excellent clinicians. Research ability and clinical ability don’t always pair.

Intrinsic motivation has driven *this* clinician to write over 600 PubMed papers. I don’t say we could abandon trainees with less intrinsic motivation: Educators should foster a “research mind” and model enthusiasm (“follow me”), which may modify intrinsic motivation somewhat. However, intrinsic motivation linked to autonomy in self-determination theory isn’t easily altered.

The second point regards “publish or perish” at residency selection. Although scholarly activity is increasingly emphasized in Canadian residency program descriptions,³ I practically chose balanced, cooperative candidates without

much weighing research output, knowing <10% remain in academia. I did not aim to select my research successor.

Researcher-clinicians may be needed but demanding it for all is impractical and unnecessary. Top priority is to support trainees who have intrinsic motivation but external situations may prevent it. We needn’t force research on those who dislike it; they can still be outstanding clinicians. If excessive CV-driven research causes burnout, we should abandon it.

Irrespective, protecting trainees from burnout is an educators’ responsibility. How to do so should be considered even if it upends the *status quo*.

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