

Leadership 101: What medical students need to know

JAN 5, 2021

Brendan Murphy

Senior News Writer

Medical students will shape the future of the nation's health care delivery, and while learning the clinical aspects of care are significant, leadership skills are also key to one's development.

"For medical students, , being great at your coursework and understanding the science and "technical" aspects of health care delivery are the table stakes said Ann Manikas, the AMA's director of organizational development and learning. "The differentiator needed "to win" is having great leadership skills."

Released in December, the AMA Medical Student Leadership Learning Series aims to develop tomorrow leader's in health care. The five modules in the series cover topics such as communication, conflict resolution and collaboration. Having worked in leadership development for more than two decades, Manikas helped to author the content that populates the modules. For medical students looking to begin their development in leadership, she offers a few tips.

Don't count yourself out

Medical students may enter their training thinking they lack the skills to lead. Manikas says that is seldom the case.

"Leadership is not determined by a title," she said. "It's not a position. It can show up in informal ways early on. I always encourage people to think about a time they had to get others to a common goal where they had to help clarify what they were driving towards collectively. That's a good example of leadership."

Some examples of leadership that Manikas touts include volunteering in organizations, playing team sports and helping to organize school projects.

How med students learn teamwork from practicing nurses.

Understanding is an asset

Leaders need to understand where their colleagues and subordinates are coming from. That sense of empathy is important across the board, but with so many stakeholders, including sick patients, it takes on even more significance in health care.

“In all sectors, but particularly health care—leading with empathy is so important,” Manikas said. “Because of the burnout, the stress, the emotional stress, the strain, as leaders we need to focus on the work at hand but also realize we are working with human beings who have their own level of stress tolerance and resilience.

“You can still hold people accountable. But showing empathy is such a factor in whether people want to engage with you. If people are treated harshly, especially in a high-stress environment, if they don’t feel that you care, it makes it harder for people to want to be their best self and makes you less approachable.”

Learn the AMA member benefits that can help medical students thrive.

Teamwork is increasingly important

Health care is becoming far more of a team sport than ever before. That means leaders need to be able to work with others effectively. Manikas says strong collaboration is rooted in relationship building within your own arena, with managers and across the health system.

“When you think about how health care is evolving, most practices now are more than just the lone expert physician model,” she said. “It’s really about working with other experts to deliver high quality care to the patient.

“In a collaborative environment, a leader can sit down and make sure everybody’s input and expertise are in the mix. They can define people’s roles clearly. Even if you’re not in a leadership role, you can figure out how to work across boundaries.”

Learn six simple ways to master patient communication.