

# Values Clarification as a Reflective Practice For First-Year Medical Students

Adrija Chaturvedi\*, Lloyd Chen\*, Madeline McKenna\*, Mitchell Thom\*, Garrett Weskamp\*, Corinne Bazella MD, Oliver Schirokauer PHD MD  
School of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH



## Objective

Students will reflect upon and develop techniques for resolving situations where their professional responsibilities may not align with their personal beliefs.

## Introduction

### Values Clarification: Definitions

- Values serve as our internal road map, playing a key role in the decisions we make <sup>1</sup>.
- Values are often influenced by key external influencers, such as family, social group, and spiritual beliefs, as well as personal experiences <sup>2</sup>.
- Values clarification is an interventional technique developed to identify and understand one's values and moral reasoning through honest, open-minded self examination <sup>1</sup>.
- Values clarification interventions have long been used in the field of medicine, particularly when dealing with issues that involve social stigma or a discordance between personal beliefs and the provider's role <sup>1</sup>.

### Importance of Values Clarification in Medical Education

- Values Clarification fits within the current CWRU SOM curriculum, particularly in the humanistic Tuesday Seminars program
- Recent literature suggests that professional identity formation should be at the core of medical education - that beyond just learning how to act, students should also learn "who to become"<sup>3</sup>.
- Throughout their careers, physicians will face decisions in which their professional expectations clash with their personal values.
- Having a strong professional identity rooted in clearly identified personal values lends to greater logic and clarity when it comes to decision making in these scenarios.

Therefore, we created a curriculum to introduce students to physicians who have incorporated these skills into their practice, while also giving students the opportunity to begin refining this skill set in small group sessions.

## Description of Session

- **Prior to the session**, students completed a brief values clarification prework activity.
- The session began with an hour-long **large group session**, where two physicians shared their experiences with practicing values clarification in difficult clinical scenarios.
- Students then broke off into **small groups of 8-10** to discuss the exercise and their takeaways.
- A **Post-Intervention Survey** was distributed to the first-year class one week after the session. An abbreviated version of the survey can be seen in Figure 1.

## Results

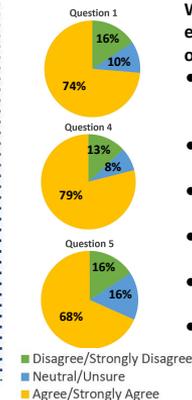
- Approximately 180 students attended the session and we received 38 total survey responses.
- Our survey sample was representative of the varied opinions that exist regarding potentially controversial topics in medicine.

We chose to highlight responses that summarize students' overall perspectives, especially in regards to Questions 1, 4, and 5, which we felt were the key objectives of our session.

- "The large group was very humanizing and placed the issues into better perspective, while the small group allowed us to really wrestle with these [controversial] issues."
- "I liked how [the presenters] didn't stop themselves from getting emotional because emotions are often tied to our values"
- "[I]mproving the patient's situation comes first and foremost. While their choices may not be the ones I would make, helping them do so is paramount."
- "I don't think this session really taught me how to do anything in specific, very vague. if anything, it just pointed out areas where our curriculum is still lacking."
- "It would be worthwhile to flat out mention that our morals should be reevaluated when they harm disadvantaged and oppressed groups."
- "I don't know if there was a specific approach taught to reconcile personal beliefs and professional duties. I don't know what you're supposed to do if this happens, except refer to another physician, which is what I think providers should do if they're unwilling to provide the medical care folks need."

	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2 (Disagree)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Agree)	5 (Strongly Agree)
1. This session helped me define a physician's professional responsibility with regard to one or more of these healthcare scenarios.					
4. This session helped me understand and appreciate how, as a physician, I may experience conflict between my personal values and professional obligations.					
5. This session will help me better navigate situations in which my professional responsibility does not align with my personal beliefs.					

Figure 1: Post-Intervention Survey (Abbreviated)



## Discussion

### Conclusions

- Overall, students responded well to a novel values clarification exercise within the Tuesday Seminars curriculum, with over two-thirds of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with each positive Likert scale statement.
- Many (74%) students felt they could better define a physician's professional responsibility in various healthcare scenarios.
- The majority of students (68%) stated they were better equipped to handle conflicts between their personal values and professional obligations.
- In their free responses, students described their appreciation for the physicians sharing their perspectives as well as the small group discussions for exploring their own values.

### Limitations

- The unprecedented entirely novel online curriculum has led to a collective feeling of "feedback fatigue" among the M1 class. We acknowledge these circumstances and are appreciative of their responses.

### For the Future

- Students expressed frustration with the lack of a concrete approach to reconcile personal beliefs and professional duties. This frustration is valid; however, each scenario in which a physician's personal and professional duties conflict is unique, and there isn't one concrete answer.
- This concept should have been made more clear to students at the onset of the exercise.

## References

1. Turner, Katherine L. and Kimberly Chapman Page. 2008. Abortion attitude transformation: A values clarification toolkit for global audiences. Chapel Hill, NC, Ipaas.
2. THE ABORTION OPTION: A VALUES CLARIFICATION GUIDE FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS, National Abortion Federation, 2005.
3. Pawlina, W. (2019), Not "How Should I Learn?" or "How Should I Act?" but, "Who Shall I Become?": A Précis on the Roots of Early Professional Identity Formation in the Anatomy Course. *Anat Sci Educ*, 12: 465-467.