

Narcissism in Medical Students - A Matter of Concern

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The term, Narcissism derives from the tragic story of the Greek Folklore, about a young man, named, Narcissus. He fell in love with his own appearance, which he saw in a pool of water and started getting infatuated by it to the point that he eventually died, looking at it continuously for weeks and months. Presently, Narcissism is a terminology used in Personality Psychology.¹ Narcissism, is defined as a grand view of self and feeling of superiority of one's own talents and a desire for admiration, an extreme sense of entitlement, lack of empathy, and selfishness and egoism. The culture in our society of considering getting admission in medical college as one of the highest academic achievements, has somewhat made students feel superior in academic as well as their professional abilities. Hence, Narcissism is being observed as a prominent abnormality in personality among a lot of medical students.²

It has been quite concerning news that medical professionals display narcissistic personality characters which may harm their future patient dealing and further damage the already spoiled reputation of doctors in our society. This trait starts showing at student level. Students showing narcissistic traits are in lead among the medical students. Psycho-social methods should be implemented to help students overcome these insufficiencies.

Medical studies are physically and mentally demanding. The arduous workload and the exhaustive program as well as the pressure to do well on the assessments contributes to the stressful environment. Lack of moderation activities also contribute and plays a leading role in the development of the stress. So, undeniably, stress is a normal part of a medical student's routine.

The number of people having narcissistic personality traits has reached a 30% increase has been seen over the last four decades. In America, every 1 in 200 persons, have this disorder. There are major gender differences, almost of people with narcissistic personality disorder are male.³

According to a study in USA, narcissism occurs in 17% of first-year medical students.⁴ However, data on narcissism

in medical students are limited, more so in the local context. A study done in 2019 in Karachi University among 1145 students of the age group 18 to 25, showed high scores of narcissistic personality Inventory (NPI), male (47.44%) and females (43.63%) showed overt narcissism signs.⁵

It used to be a misconception, especially in the UK, that health professionals are more narcissistic than common people as they feel they are superior in their profession and abilities, especially Surgeons.⁶ One study done among health care professional in UK, claims to refute the assumption that Medical professional are more Narcissistic than common public.⁷

People with narcissistic personality disorder often seen to be selfish, however this is because they're usually making up for a fragile sense of their weak self-esteem. Personalities high in narcissistic traits have an embellished feeling of self-importance which impedes their decisions. This usually makes them think grand about themselves and they overestimate their abilities. However, sub-clinical narcissism is considered to possess a positive competitive side to it and not always considered as a negative trait. Some studies claim that it is related with academic success, possibly because of competitive desire in narcissistic students.

There are two sides of a narcissist. He/ She is someone who defends his/her ego and to control people and the environment. Also, who wishes to enhance ego, pursues achievement, acts independently and selects short-term goals that might lead to approval and validation from others. This might help them achieve their goals of the highly demanding medical profession if they use their good side of this personality trait in a controlled manner.

Medical institutes need to encourage student counselling and students should be taught to overcome such negative personality characteristics. Psychological interventions made for solving these problems should be incorporated into the framework of medical teaching. There is also urgent need to probe further into the matter and to study and document the overall mental health of medical students.

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