Personal values as predictors of medical students’ empathy

The purpose of this study was to assess personal values in a sample of Italian medical students and to investigate to what extent empathy dimensions could be predicted by value priorities.

Materials
Portrait Values Questionnaire-40 (PVQ-40) according to the Schwartz's theory of basic human values, the Italian version (7) of PVQ-40 (8) was employed to assess the medical students’ values sets:
- TRANSCENDENCE (Benevolence and Universalism);
- SELF-ENHANCEMENT (Achievement and Power);
- OPENNESS TO CHANGE (Self-direction, Stimulation, and Hedonism);
- CONSERVATION (Conformity, Tradition, and Security).

Results

The specific interest of the study was to explore whether personal value priorities contributed to empathy scores when entered after gender and age variables.

VALUE RANKINGS: Self-Transcendence value was the most important value type in our sample, followed by Openness to Change, Conservation and Self-Enhancement.

GENDER DIFFERENCES: Male medical students scored higher in self-promotion values and Openness to Change dimension, while female students were more disposed to conservation and to transcend selfish interests.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VALUES AND EMPATHY: high levels of Self-Transcendence values were related to high levels of concern for adversities of other people. Moreover, the medical students’ tendency to adopt the psychological point of view of others was significantly and negatively predicted by personal value scores.

Discussion
During the pre-clinical years, medical educators should develop assessment and educational strategies to improve students’ awareness about their personal values since they are early predictors of emotional and cognitive empathy.

Take-home message

References