

## Self-Reflection for Lifelong Learning

### Objectives:

- To introduce self-reflection as a tool for lifelong growth.
- To give examples of questions (in the form of a handout) that may be used as a platform for self-reflection.
- To create an environment for group discussion on self-reflection, on how it may have impacted individuals lives, both personally and professionally.

### Brief description:

Many medical students are unknowingly trained to include self-reflection in their HPI's when talking with patients. "How does that make you feel?" A question inviting the patient to reflect on how a set of symptoms may be affecting their emotional wellbeing. For some students, this question is included in every patient encounter, whether a patient with a chronic disease or an acute condition. Asking how that person feel opens a channel to connect with them on an intimate level that goes beyond symptomology and diagnosis.

Yet far less often are medical students trained to include self-reflect on their own experiences in medicine. "How does this make ME feel?" A question inviting the medical student to reflect on how the rigors of medical education and clinical training are affecting their emotional wellbeing.

Definitions for self-reflection: "...self-reflection is the capacity of humans to exercise introspection and the willingness to learn more about their fundamental nature, purpose and essence" and "meditation or serious thought about one's character, actions, and motives."

Self-reflection is an opportunity for conceptualization, categorization, personal development, self-growth, and self-learning. An opportunity for an individual to ask themselves questions that may guide them through difficult circumstances or decisions, such as deciding on which medical specialty they wish to pursue.

Although often thought to be a personal process, small group sessions reflecting on individual and team functioning are found to be helpful in the setting of medical education.

The purpose of this roundtable discussion is to provide an opportunity for participants to consider self-reflection as a tool for self-learning, and how this may be translated into personal and patient care. It will include examples of questions of self-pondering, such as:

Does this make me happy?

Why am I doing this?

What kind of person do I hope to be? What can I do today to help me achieve this?



References:

Menard L, Rantnapalam S. Reflection in Medicine, Models and application. *Canadian Family Physician*. 2013;59:105-107.

Wald HS. Professional Identity (Trans)Formation in Medical Education. *Academic Medicine*. 2015;90(6):701-706. doi:10.1097/acm.0000000000000731.

Mindfulness reflects our mental, emotional, and spiritual attitude as we encounter life. It is the capacity to reflect and have an awareness beyond physical presence that life in the secret to wellness. It is the difference between being involved in life and understanding life. It is not just being engaged with life, it is *noticing* how I am engaging in life.

Analogy: If we look in a mirror, we see a reflection of our own body. Reflecting our posture, our grooming, physical state, our aging, and our choice of clothing – our superficial self. Thus, we have a capacity to see what is happening on the outside.

In the practice of self-reflection, we look in a mirror of our thoughts, feelings, fears, and dreams. This, we have a capacity to question ourselves in an attempt to better understand our experience and our intentions. The purpose of this reflection and awareness is to use as a foundation for our lifelong and continued growth.

This is *not* an intuitive process. You are not expected to inherently question your emotional wellbeing following a difficult experience. Many of us are not “aware of self,” but we can become this way through *habitual and purposeful reflection*. Our development and growth as healthcare providers requires, at minimum, a certain reflective capacity. One that acts as the basis to help us make the best decisions for our self, within our healthcare teams, and for our patients.

### **When to use reflection?**

#### **After a difficult, or successful, or failed patient encounter; noticing questions:**

- What just happened?
- How did I respond?
- Why did I respond that way?
- How should I have responded?
- What were you thinking when ...?
- What surprised you in that case?
- How does it make you feel?
- What is the consequence, if any, of feeling this way?
- How can I respond the way I want to next time?

#### **When developing a professional identity:**

- Does this make me happy? Why? How? When?
- Do I believe I am helping make a difference? Make an impact?
- Am I part of something larger than myself?
  - o If not, what do I feel I need to achieve this?
  - o If so, do I find my involvement fulfilling?
- What kind of person do I hope to be? Both personally and professionally.
  - o Will this career help me achieve these goals? Is the career in itself my goal?
- If unhappy with career choice: Am I willing to make the change if I am unhappy?
  - o If not, what is stopping me?
  - o If so, how do I make sure this really is the right decision?
    - What smaller changes should I make in my life first before the bigger changes are made?

### **When choosing a medical specialty:**

For medical students, it is important to reflect in this manner when deciding which medical specialty one hopes to pursue. Reflecting upon professional identity helps facilitate this process, but recognizing and reflection on our personal and family priorities is also necessary to achieve confidence in this choice. We must keep in mind that when reflecting on the future self, we are looking at most evolved expression of who we are today and who we want to be tomorrow.

- Surgery, Medical or Mixed specialty?
  - o Do I prefer a specialty that is more procedure-oriented or one that emphasizes patient relationships and clinical reasoning?
  - o How important is doing procedures?
- How much patient contact and continuity do I want?
- What kind of patient population would I like to work with?
- What is my area of scientific/clinical interest?
  - o A certain organ system that is most exciting? Which clinical questions do I find most intriguing?
- What type of activities do I want to engage in? Do I want to pursue non-clinical interests?
  - o i.e. research, academia, policy, etc.
- How important is work/life balance?
  - o What kind of hours do I want to work?
  - o Would I prefer shift work? To have weekends off?
  - o How much call am I willing to take?
- How important is earning potential?

### **In the team setting:**

- Apply the exact noticing question, especially in patient care:
  - o What just happened?
  - o What were you thinking when...?
  - o What surprised you in that case?
  - o What does it make you feel?
  - o Why does it make you feel that way?
  - o Are there consequences of you feeling like this?
- When making decisions as a team, this can be used beyond and outside of patient care.
  - o Are we doing this the right way?
  - o Are there alternatives?
  - o Is this applicable in our setting?
  - o What does this mean?
  - o What do we need (i.e. resources, knowledge, skills) to resolve this problem?
  - o What are the barriers to...?
- Reflecting upon the decision:
  - o Did everyone feel appropriately involved in this process?
  - o How can we improve how we made our decision?
  - o What will we do differently next time?