

This curriculum, a memorial effort based on Dr. Christensen's body of work encompassed in his articles, is also an effort to address and expand upon the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Commentary on Ethics in Practice (1) and the American Medical Association's (AMA's) Principles of Medical Ethics (2). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) Commentary on Ethics in Practice (1) reveals to clinicians that ethical conduct by psychiatrists requires not only knowledge of ethical principles, but also that psychiatrists consistently apply this knowledge in day-to-day professional activities. The APA Commentary goes on to comment on a set of core abilities that every psychiatrist should master and utilize. These abilities include:

1. Recognizing ethical aspects of a professional clinical situation.
2. Reflecting on one's role, motives, potential "blind spots" and conflicting and competing interests.
3. Seeking out and making use of additional knowledge and available resources when necessary.
4. Systematically evaluating the ethical aspects of different clinical situations and identifying a course of action.
5. Creating appropriate ethical safeguards in ethically complex situations.
6. Seeking appropriate consultation and supervision when necessary.
7. Maintaining clear professional boundaries.

The authors of the curriculum kept these abilities in mind while constructing the curriculum. In particular, item 2 on the list, "blind spots," is especially applicable to our third module on diagnostic overshadowing. Item 4 on the list is applicable especially to our fourth module that focuses on relationships with pharmaceutical representatives and gives students the perspective to avoid potentially hazardous interactions. For every item on the list, the discussions encouraged after each module are a place to reflect upon these abilities.

The American Medical Association (AMA) also puts forth a list of core principles that have been adopted as standards for conduct that define the essentials of honorable behavior for a physician. The AMA Principles of Medical Ethics (2) include the following:

1. A physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical care, with compassion and respect for human dignity and rights.
2. A physician shall uphold the standards of professionalism, be honest in all professional interactions and strive to report physicians deficient in character or competence, or engaging in fraud or deception, to appropriate entities.
3. A physician shall respect the law and also recognize a responsibility to seek changes in those requirements which are contrary to the best interests of the patient.

4. A physician shall respect the rights of patients, colleagues, and other health professionals, and shall safeguard patient confidences and privacy within the constraints of the law.
5. A physician shall continue to study, apply, and advance scientific knowledge, maintain a commitment to medical education, make relevant information available to patients, colleagues, and the public, obtain consultation, and use the talents of other health professionals when indicated.
6. A physician shall, in the provision of appropriate patient care, except in emergencies, be free to choose whom to serve, with whom to associate, and the environment in which to provide medical care.
7. A physician shall recognize a responsibility to participate in activities contributing to the improvement of the community and the betterment of public health.
8. A physician shall, while caring for a patient, regard responsibility to the patient as paramount.
9. A physician shall support access to medical care for all people.

The curriculum embodies these principles, but it makes a point of especially addressing the ninth item on the list. Just as serving underserved populations was a priority for Dr. Christensen, these modules, especially the fifth module prepared by Dr. Sheryl Fleisch, seek to shine light on this service in an academic context. This is an understudied topic in ethics, a situation this curriculum seeks to rectify.

References:

1. American Psychiatric Association. (2015). APA Commentary on Ethics in Practice. Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/Ethics/APA-Commentary-on-Ethics-in-Practice.pdf>. Accessed November 23, 2017.
2. American Medical Association. (June 2001). Principles of Medical Ethics. Retrieved from <https://www.ama-assn.org/sites/default/files/media-browser/2001-principles-of-medical-ethics.pdf>, Accessed November 13, 2017.