

Received: 11 Feb 2014
Revised: 01 Mar 2014
Accepted: 09 Mar 2014

White Coat Ceremony: a Medical Student's Journey from Basic Sciences to Clinical Medicine

Sedigheh Ebrahimi¹✉

¹Medical Ethics Department, Shiraz Medical School, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran.

Dear Editor

There are some interesting rituals associated with medical education at many medical schools throughout the world. One of the most fascinating blends of meaningful tradition and innovation is the white coat ceremony (WCC). A plausible explanation for this ceremony is an assumed connection between that and encouraging professional development in medicine. It is also mainly based on the positive emotions in the participants as they feel a sense of respect, inclusion and honor [1].

The WCC is an educational activity, put on by medical schools to introduce medical students to the world of clinical medicine by offering them "the white coat", the symbol for becoming a doctor.

Given the cultural significance of "whiteness" that traditionally indicates purity and goodness. The pureness of medicine became reflected in the white coat of doctors. Wearing white, is a way of suggesting the need for cleanliness personified and for having a pure heart and mind to see goodness and purity in everything [2,3].

The WCC reminds the medical students of the need for their responsibility to uphold and advance personal and professional honor, integrity, and the dignity of their profession. It creates a psychological and ethical covenant for the profession from the beginning of the practice of medicine.

In Iranian medical schools the ceremony is

held twice a year in the end of basic sciences and before entering into a new stage of education as clinical sciences. It has become a symbol of students' transition from the study of preclinical sciences to practicing medicine. In Shiraz medical school, at the beginning of the WCC programs, students participate in ethics workshops and get prepared to make a relation between the clinical education to the ethical values and professionalism. The workshops focus on the role of physicians in society, with emphasis on spirituality, professionalism, empathy, responsibility, and the respectful doctor-patient relationship. The students enjoy the program, believing that medical ethics will serve as a guide in ethical challenges that they encounter in their future practices.

The ceremony is started with a welcome speech given by the medical school dean and his administrator colleagues. It continues with the messages from the chancellor of the university, vice chancellor for education and an inspirational message from a role model to express his/her clinical experiences. Then, the chairmen of major clinical departments explain what a medical student should know and what must be employed in academic departments. Afterward, a faculty-authored professional and moral advice (Andarz) is declaimed by a prominent faculty member on behalf of all clinical teachers asking the audience that they must never forget to reflect on what the purposes of being a good doctor

GMJ

©2013 Galen Medical Journal
Fax: +98 731 2227091
PO Box 7461686688
Email: info@gmj.ir



✉ **Correspondence to:**

Sedigheh Ebrahimi MD, Associate professor of Pediatrics,
Medical ethics department, Shiraz Medical School, Shiraz
University of medical sciences, Shiraz, Iran
Telephone Number: -
Email Address : sedighehebrah@yahoo.com

are. He urges them to be proud of the fact that the core objective of doctors is to do the best for the health of the patients they serve. Afterward the students pray to god for help in a style of contemporary litany and also recite their class pledge of honor written by them. Thereafter, with a symbolic representation in the presence of friends and families, the students will be cloaked in their first white coat by one of the selected faculty members. In a “celebration atmosphere” students take in unison and eagerly swear the professional oath of ethical behavior with youthful energy (Table-1). This oath has been explored by

the chair of the Medical ethics department of the university. When the students take an oath, they actually promise to carry out the roles and the responsibilities to the patients who trust them, in the best possible way. They commit themselves to act honorably as a medical student and encounter with the people in such a way that does not distort their trust in the health care professionals.

The oath of commitment to the patient care emphasizes on the primacy of the respectful Patient-Physician relationship and the importance of kindness in medicine. It declares the students’ loyalty and honesty toward medi-

Table 1. The Texts of Oath (Clinical Treaty)

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Now with the help of God’s kindness and assistance of the teachers and our perseverance we have succeeded to embark upon our long journey to physicianship and to join the health advocates. Hereby we render this oath in the divine presence and In the presence of the souls of holy prophets and all the scholars and righteous human , we pledge to uphold the following tenets to the best of our abilities:

To learn theoretical knowledge and clinical skills scholarly.

To cultivate in ourselves a drive to excellence through constant learning and critical self-reflection and capability of interpreting health -related phenomena.

To strive in the pursuit of knowledge for making major changes in the treatment and prevention of diseases.

To not forget magnanimity in acquiring knowledge and innovation.

To use the obtained knowledge and skills in order to support the own and others’ health altruistically, and to extend our hand of service to one and all who seek our help.

In doing the great efforts reduce our despair against occasional failure, given that God is the only being who contained the infinity and the eternity.

Recalling that praise be to Allah, the only healer, reduce our humbleness in acquiring the pearls of the health knowledge.

Because our success in all phases of our profession beholds to the efforts and sacrifices of human society, especially parents and teachers, try to honor them diligently.

O GOD, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, endeavor to the utmost of thy powers and in Thy name to learn and to serve for the benefit of mankind, and to uphold human honor and dignity and to respect the confidence and guard the secrets of all my patients.

cine and patients; along with their professional and academic power and duties as medical students. The oath also reminds them of the sense of responsibility inherent in the practice of medicine.

The WCC is an important step in professional development that associates some of the best qualities we would like to see in physicians with the incoming students themselves. It can help align medical students and medical faculty around worthy professional values and commitments that bind all doctors. The students' strong sense of unity helps them initiate a move through an exciting time in their lives and find the importance of committing them-

selves to excellence, not only in the medical sciences but also in its humanitarian aspects [4,5].

Overall, WCC places the student at the beginning of the development of a particular type of identity: that of the medical profession [5]. Nevertheless, the WCC is a useful first step as an experience by which novice students become aware of the need to balance excellence in science with compassionate patient care at the beginning of their careers [4]. It encourages compassion and humility in medical students and connects them to the "idea of humanistic competence and not just scientific or technical ability" [1,4].

References

1. Gillon R. White coat ceremonies for new medical students. *J Med Ethics*. 2000;26(2):83-4.
2. Wear D. On white coats and professional development: the formal and hidden curricula. *Ann Intern Med*. 1998;129(9):734-7.
3. Blumhagen DW. The doctor's white coat: the image of the physician in modern America. *Ann Intern Med*. 1979;91(1):111-16.
4. Huber SJ. Through the Student's Eyes: The White Coat Ceremony. *Virtual Mentor*. 2002;4(4).
5. Huber SJ. The white coat ceremony: a contemporary medical ritual. *J Med Ethics*. 2003;29(6):364-6.