

Medical Students:  
Origins, Selection, Attitudes and Culture

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## Abstract.

The attitudes of medical students to ethical problems are the principle subject of this thesis, those attitudes being likely to affect subsequent clinical practice. Two empirical studies have examined the effects of selection upon attitudes and the development of ethical attitudes during the undergraduate years. In so doing both studies have necessarily broadened, to ask many other questions about medical students, without which a study of ethical attitudes would be inconclusive. The St. Mary's study was a prospective investigation of medical student selection during 1980-81. Questions were asked about bias in selection (both at St. Mary's and overall), and about the process of selection itself, concentrating particularly on short-listing and interviewing. In addition comments of the applicants were carefully examined, and recommendations made for improving selection. The Birmingham study was a cross-sequential study of medical students over the years 1977-1981, transverse studies of the five undergraduate years taking place in 1977 and 1981, and the entry cohorts of the years 1977-1980 being followed up in 1981. Five major factors were examined in relation to the ethical attitudes of medical students. Selection was shown to have almost no influence upon the attitudes held by students. Maturation and Medical training were shown to have effects that could be discriminated by statistical analysis, maturation having the larger and more general effects, whilst medical training tended to affect specifically medical issues. Cultural interests were measured on a newly developed scale, and were found to have moderate correlations with attitudes. Religion was of major importance in determining attitudes. Causal analysis, by examining cross-lagged panel correlations, suggested that religion determined attitudes, whereas attitudes themselves determined cultural interests.

For my parents,  
without whom I would never have studied medicine,  
and for Diana,  
without whom I would never have studied medical students.

"Much to cast down, much to build, much to restore;  
Let the work not delay, time and the arm not waste;  
Let the clay be dug from the pit, let the saw cut the stone,  
Let the fire not be quenched in the forge".

T.S. Eliot, The Rock.

Medical Students: Origin, selection, attitudes and culture.

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