



Teachings of Marcus Aurelius for the development of leadership skills in medical students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Leadership is a vital part of the doctor's daily repertoire. Leadership training can be part of medical curriculum. Management schools have fulltime courses in leadership development. Also several philosophers' teachings are useful for leadership training. There is scarcity of literature about leadership within medical settings. Medical students rarely receive such training. **Teachings of Marcus Aurelius:** Here I have discussed the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, the emperor of Rome and its relevance to health care settings. **Conclusion:** This article suggests that it can be a part of leadership development programs for medical students. This article also aims to stimulate further discussion on leadership training in medical schools.

KEY WORDS: Medical education; Medical leadership; Medical students; Philosophy-in-medicine

INTRODUCTION

There is considerably less literature about leadership within medical settings[1]. Leadership training courses are traditionally taught in management schools. Doctors have to routinely take up leadership positions, like while coordinating management of a poly-trauma patient. But medical students in most of the countries do not receive leadership training.

As leadership and management are increasingly seen as a vital part of the doctor's daily repertoire, medical schools are starting to implement leadership development programs as a routine part of curriculum with opportunities for some students to take extended study in leadership[2].

The concept of distributed leadership incorporates inclusivity, collectiveness and collaboration, with the result that, all staff, not just those in senior management roles, are viewed as leaders[3]. So even the junior resident should be a leader, e.g., when he is resuscitating a patient with cardiac arrest with a team of paramedics.

Leadership development programs are to improve leadership skills. The content of these programs varies widely[3].

One of the fundamental advantages a doctor has over others in leadership positions is his basic training in studying and understanding human nature[4]. Doctors have become leaders in various fields in society. In India, doctors have become Heads of government of various states. It may be noted here that all of them were very popular among people. The highest medical research award in India is

named after a doctor chief minister. It is not that only non-specialist doctor has to be a leader. After specialization, the leadership qualities are needed more, as they have to lead a specialty team.

The development of leadership in medical students is needed for their professional growth too. But in India, probably in many other nations world-wide, leadership development programs are not part of curriculum for medical students. However, some nations have started training programs for physician-in-training to learn and develop leadership skills. 'Learning To Make a Difference' program and others like it, are helping to teach leadership[5].

The most fundamental restructuring of medicine is currently occurring—stemming, in part, from the application of contemporary philosophy of science to the medical field[6]. Branches of philosophy are reshaping medical ethics. These have included influences from Kantian theory of respect for persons, personal identity theory, philosophy of biology, linguistic analysis of the concepts of health and disease, personhood theory, epistemology, and political philosophy[6].

It is timely to contribute to the global conversation on health care that focuses on addressing the conceptual basis of medicine and related disciplines, considering the ethical aspects of clinical practice, and exploring its intersection with the humanities (including history of medicine)[7]. Centuries back, natural philosophy covered the fields of philosophy, science, and medicine.

Stoic philosophy is an ancient Greek philosophy. It teaches the development of self-control. It enables a person to develop clear judgment, and inner calm. This is especially needed, when a doctor is dealing with a patient in Intensive Care Unit (ICU). It is a kind of meditation aimed at training one's attention to remain in the present moment. The present moment in this case is the care of the ICU patient, and nothing else. The term "stoic" was taken from the "stoa poikile" (meaning "painted porch" or "colonnade") where Zeno of Citium used to teach.

Stoic philosophy is used by US army for Warrior Resilience Training (WRT) also. It is an educational class designed to enhance Warrior resilience, thriving, and posttraumatic growth for soldiers deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom [8]. Warrior Resilience Training uses rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT), Army leadership principles, and positive psychology as a vehicle for students to apply resilient philosophies derived from Army Warrior Ethos, Stoic philosophy, and the survivor and resiliency literature. Students in WRT are trained to focus upon virtue, character, and emotional self-regulation by constructing and maintaining a personal resiliency philosophy that emphasizes critical thinking, rationality, virtue, and Warrior Ethos.

Stoic philosophy is being advocated for care of medical outliers too. Medical outliers are the patients who present to medical practices without health insurance or with serious co-morbidities needing prolonged hospital stay. Medical outliers are psychological and economic challenge to the physicians who care for them. The determinism of Stoic thought is explored as an intellectual basis for the pursuit of a correct mental attitude that will provide aid and comfort to physicians who care for medical outliers, thus fostering continued physician engagement in their care [9].

Marcus Aurelius was emperor of Rome. He is considered one of the greatest stoic philosophers. He was educated by the finest scholars and teachers in the world at the time, and went through things that only a few men that have ever lived will experience. *Meditations*, despite its title, is a series of his personal writings which embodies his ideas on stoic philosophy [10]. It was split into 12 books. Much of it was written in the last decade of his life, while he was leading the Roman army on campaigns against Germanic tribes encroaching Rome's borders. His stoic ideas focus on freeing men from the pains and pleasures of the material world. His overall message is that the only way a man can be harmed is to allow his reaction to overpower him.

TEACHINGS OF MARCUS AURELIUS:[11]

1. If you don't have a consistent goal in life, you can't live it in a consistent way.
2. Concentrate every minute like a Roman – like a man

– on doing what's in front of you with precise and genuine seriousness, tenderly, willingly, with justice.

3. Let the spirit in you represent a man, an adult, a citizen, a Roman, a ruler. Taking up his post like a soldier.
4. That every event is the right one. Look closely and you'll see. Not just the right one overall, but right. As if someone had weighed it out with scales. Keep looking closely like that, and embody it in your actions: goodness – what defines a good person. Keep to it in everything you do.
5. Our inward power turns obstacles into fuel. As a fire overwhelms what would have quenched a lamp. What's thrown on top of the conflagration is absorbed, consumed by it – and makes it burn still higher.
6. To welcome with affection what is sent by fate. Not to stain or disturb the spirit within him with a mess of false beliefs. Instead, to preserve it faithfully, by calmly obeying God – saying nothing untrue, doing nothing unjust.
7. Does your reputation bother you? But look at how soon we're all forgotten. The abyss of endless time that swallows it. The emptiness of all those applauding hands. The people who praise us – how capricious they are, how arbitrary? And the tiny region in which it all takes place. How many people there will be to admire you, and who they are?
8. That every event is the right one. Look closely and you'll see. Not just the right one overall, but right. As if someone had weighed it out with scales. Keep looking closely like that, and embody it in your actions: goodness – what defines a good person. Keep to it in everything you do.
9. Love the discipline you know, and let it support you. Entrust everything willingly to the gods, and then make your way through life – no one's master and no one's slave.
10. Take refuge in these two things:
 - Nothing that can happen to me that isn't natural.
 - I can keep from doing anything that God and my own spirit don't approve. No one can force me to.
11. Keep in mind how fast things pass by and are gone – those that are now, and those to come. Existence flows past us like a river: the "what" is in constant flux, the "why" has a thousand variations. Nothing is stable, not even what's right here. So it would take an idiot to feel self-importance or distress. As if things that irritate us lasted.
12. No matter what anyone says or does, my task is to be good. Like gold or emerald or purple repeating to itself, "No matter what anyone says or does, my task is to be emerald, my color undiminished,"

CONCLUSION

Leadership development programs are intended to equip individuals to improve leadership skills. Physician leadership exists in clinical settings. Programs like 'Learning To Make a Difference' are helping to teach leadership. Stoic philosophy is used by US army for Warrior Resilience Training .Marcus Aurelius's personal writings were written while he was leading the Roman army on campaigns against enemies. It was conceived for Roman army. This article suggests that it can be a part of leadership development programs for medical students too.

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