

Letter to the Editor

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Personality tests in medical student selection

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Dear Editor,

Entailed in this letter, I discuss the prospective use of personality testing as a selection tool for medical school applicants.

For many years the medical profession has benefited from excellent job prospects, attracting the highest performing candidates to apply for medical school entry. Over time, the application of medicine has changed somewhat, with clinical research leading to more effective practice, both from the disease standpoint, and also the overall management of the patient. Despite these changes and advancements however, there has been little development in the selection of medical students.

Currently all medical schools in Australia base their selection of potential students on one or a combination of; academic scores, a pre-medical exam, previous achievements, and interview performance. This is similar to other industries, with most employers requesting academic scores, and a detailed CV prior to a structured interview for their selection process. Our profession delineates to others in that, personality tests are rarely used as a selection tool.

All selection criteria currently used has some merit underpinning its use. Previous studies have highlighted that the best predictor for academic performance in medical school is a higher GPA (grade point average).^{1,2} This is no surprise, as academic performance in medical school is likely to continue from previous accomplishment.

Non-academic selection criteria has been shown to correlate with better performance during clerkships,³ and students who score highly in previous achievements have not only been shown to perform well clinically, but have

also been shown to academically perform well in medical school.²

Generally, success in the workplace is strongly correlated to a person's ability to think critically, ability and willingness to learn new skills, and work well within a team. Other industries have made use of personality tests to predict a candidate's risk of failing to work well within their teams, or highlight any potential dysfunctional personality characteristics. Valuable information highlighted in such personality tests may benefit greatly in the medical selection process.

There is precedent for the use of these personality tests as an admission criterion for medical school. Walton, 1987 in his discussion paper entitled "Personality assessment of future doctors" showed that use of personality tests could positively predict performance of doctors in their clinical years.⁴

Despite this, currently no medical school in Australia utilises personality testing for their candidate selection process; and of all Australian postgraduate training institutes, only the Australian College of Dermatologists implements personality tests in their selection process.

These tests could be used as a tool to identify candidates with dysfunctional personality types, which could highlight individuals more likely to fail, pursue alternative careers upon graduation, or become inefficient practitioners.⁵

Sincerely,

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References

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