CORRESPONDENCE

Anesthesiologists' involvement in undergraduate medical education is beneficial to students and the specialty

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To the Editor,

Anesthesiologists should be more involved in undergraduate medical education (UGME)—they currently contribute a median of 2.2 teaching hours per faculty member in the pre-clerkship curriculum at Canadian medical schools.¹ Though this is a low number considering the broad spectrum of knowledge that anesthesiologists possess, it is nevertheless an 817% increase from 2001 where the median was only 14.4 min.¹

Anesthesiologists' knowledge of physiology and pharmacology, coupled with expertise in airway, fluid, and pain management uniquely position them to teach within the UGME curriculum. Regrettably, anesthesiologists face barriers to involvement in UGME, the most glaring one being their relative inflexible schedule due to operating room commitments.² Nevertheless, we hope to plead a convincing case as to why anesthesiologists are fundamental to early training, in hopes to foster conversations among administrators around how to better include anesthesiologists in UGME.

One example of the role that anesthesiologist can play in UGME is highlighted by the Anaesthetists' Non-Technical Skills (ANTS) checklist—a tool created by and for

anesthesiologists—for the assessment of “non-technical skills” in medical students.³ This assessment tool showed that medical students would benefit from further training in situational awareness and decision-making, both of which could aid in optimizing patient safety, whilst decreasing perioperative errors and subsequent medicolegal litigation.³ Expertise in these areas is an example of a perfectly tailored opportunity for anesthesiologists to share insight and address a need in UGME.⁴

Failure to involve anesthesiologists more in UGME is a disservice to medical students and the field of anesthesiology. Medical students can benefit from learning skills identified not only on the ANTS checklist but also by the objectives in the Medical Council of Canada (MCC) Blueprint, which drives the undergraduate curricula. As physicians who are highly skilled at communication, management, and professional behaviours, the MCC Blueprint showcases important areas in which anesthesiologists are well equipped to teach.³ The aforementioned skills can serve students well in complex clinical settings in any field. Furthermore, it is imperative for anesthesiologists to seize the opportunity of educating, influencing, and courting learners to inspire the future generation of innovators, educators, and leaders in anesthesia. Medical students deserve to learn about anesthesiology early in their training and they further deserve the potential opportunity to join the field and become invaluable assets to the specialty.

Anesthesia is a captivating area of medicine, and one that many students wish they had earlier exposure to in order to aid with their career exploration.⁵ At the University of Toronto, lack of exposure and knowledge of the specialty is reported as why > 70% of students did not consider anesthesia as a top career choice.⁵ Following

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exposure to anesthesia in upper years, 50% of students reported that they would have considered anesthesia in their top three career choices if they had been exposed to it earlier.⁵ The benefits of early exposure to anesthesia in UGME is not only limited to the realm of career selection. Increasing UGME involvement could garner additional respect and an appreciation by others for what they do—i.e., regardless of whether students ultimately choose to pursue anesthesia, future colleagues of anesthesiologists would have a better understanding of what they do and more respect for anesthesia as a discipline. Recruitment to the specialty is not the only goal. Increased understanding of anesthesiologists' roles can also improve team dynamics and collaboration between colleagues, ultimately leading to enhanced patient care.

It appears that most, if not all, stakeholders (medical students, anesthesiologists, the MCC, and the discipline itself) can benefit from increased involvement of anesthesiologists in UGME. A student's life could take a positive turn should they have the pleasure of learning essential skills from accomplished anesthesiologists. Students and anesthesiologists are missing out on fostering mentors and mentees, respectively—a very rewarding and necessary component of medical training.² Furthermore, early involvement of anesthesiologists in UGME curriculum across Canada may increase the likelihood that more talented students do not miss out on the possibility to be inspired to join the ranks among anesthesiologists in pursuing a fascinating career.

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