Letter to the Editor

Reflection on the "national scientific Olympiad for medical sciences students": Re-emphasizing the role of reward and encouragement in medical education

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Success and progress in medical education are affected by various factors and components, one of the most important of which is students' motivation. National Scientific Olympiad for Medical Sciences Students in Iran is held every year with the presence of a wide range of medical students from different fields to identify students with talent and high learning potential currently in six areas of medical education: clinical reasoning, scientific thinking in basic sciences, entrepreneurship in the context of third generation universities, health system management and interdisciplinary studies (1).

This Scientific Olympiad is held in two stages and separate sections: individual and group. In the end, the subjects who get the highest scores are honored with medals, certificates, and financial prizes. Regardless of the goal and success of this Olympiad, the outstanding and considerable issue in medical education is the role of encouragement and reward in learning from the perspective of this National Olympiad. What was observed and experienced in different periods of the Scientific Olympiad is an emphasis on the role of rewards and encouragement - both material and immaterial - in the enhancement of student's learning motivation.

Although rewards, especially material ones, are not always motivating, they can serve as an effective factor in our educational system, as we have observed in Scientific Olympiads. The authors have been involved in executive responsibility of the Scientific Olympiad, or they were students (Olympiad bronze medalists) and Olympiad teachers (Medical Education field) in several universities of medical sciences (more than 12 universities of medical sciences). By reflecting on this important educational event, they have acknowledged and experienced the important role of reward and encouragement (and vice versa, its absence) in students and their learning.

It seems that those involved in university education at different levels should pay attention that this experience can be generalized to the overall education of students and used in the complex decision-making process to improve education. Although educational systems are familiar with reward and encouragement, the experience of the Scientific Olympiad of Medical Science Universities at the national level once again demonstrated material and non-material rewards could play a significant role in motivating students, even those who do not need material rewards. Nonetheless, the important role of incentives and material rewards

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cannot be ignored. This issue was observed and experienced regardless of the field of the Olympiad.

It indicates that basic and precise strategies, measures, and programs should be designed by educational decision-makers, especially in the Education Development Center (EDC) of universities of medical sciences. One of the priorities and targeted measures in this regard is presenting prizes, appreciation, rewards, and material and immaterial incentives. It is worth noting that the Scientific Olympiad Center in the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in Iran has also carried out extensive and effective measures and activities in this field. During an official ceremony, the top students are honored. Nonetheless, it is suggested that this issue should be generalized to other educational activities in the universities of medical sciences in the field of student learning and not limited to the Medical Scientific Olympiad.

The suggested strategies in this regard include holding scientific competitions in the university among educational departments with common disciplines and honoring the winners, acclaiming the innovative and creative activities of students in the university, as well as identifying students with special and different talents. It is expected that this will exert a positive effect on students and their scientific interests and leads to a sense of enthusiasm. Therefore, it is suggested that in addition to the current measures taken so far in the Medical Scientific Olympiads to acclaim students, the variety of these rewards should be increased. Furthermore, the educational system decision-makers of the medical universities should implement them in students' specialized and core courses in an attempt to promote and elaborate the learning culture in the medical universities as one of the most essential learning organizations in society, apart from honoring the scientific-educational activities of students. All these issues can lead to the improvement of the educational system and, consequently, the health system and its ultimate goal, which is caring for and ensuring the health of patients, people, and society. In so doing, it will be a step towards accountable education.

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