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Practicing social responsibility in medicine: from theory to practice. Results of an international Delphi survey

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Introduction. Although the social accountability (SA) of faculties of medicine has been defined since 1995, the SA of health professionals themselves remains a complex concept, which requires clear interpretation. SA is a multidimensional and comprehensive concept. It is thus difficult to be translated in competencies, to be taught and to be concretely implemented in the field of professional practice. This study, conducted by the Réseau International Francophone pour la Responsabilité Sociale en Santé (RIFRESS), aims to develop a competency profile of a physician whose activities are consistent with SA.

Method. A three rounds Delphi consensus method was used, the first round being opened, and the second and third round being closed. Thirty-four experts in medical education responded to the study: deans, heads of department, teachers, supervisors and students. The Mesydel software was used to manage the organization and to do the qualitative analysis of the first round. SPSS was used for the consensus analysis. The consensus was defined by an interquartile range of one unit around the median.

Results. During the first round, 62 codes emerged, grouped into 13 themes. From the initial analysis, 40 items were submitted for the Delphi round two. Of these 40 items, 23 came out consensual after the second round, and 13 on the 18 resubmitted items after the third. Five items did not find consensus. Eco-responsibility, advocacy, defence of the common good, critical analysis of one's practice, collaborative leadership are examples of items that emerged as consensual.

Discussion/conclusion. The present study represents a much-needed effort to concretely define a competency profile of a socially responsible physician. Such a profile must be used in the light of the context of the society it is applied to and of what is already taught in MD programs. It should help better train tomorrow's physicians to meet priority health needs of society in a profoundly changing world.

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