

Did you know-- UIC COLLEGE OF MEDICINE HONOR CODE IS ALIVE AND WELL

By James McFadden, MD,
Dave Ramsey, M-3, and
Patrick Guinan, MD

The UIC-COM Honor Code was the inspiration Debra Clayman, MD, professor of psychiatry, and Leslie Sandlow, MD, senior associate dean of academic affairs. A subcommittee of the 1999-2000 Student Council drafted and officially approved the Code on Jan 29, 2001



The essence of Hippocrates, whose Oath is the exemplary honor code in medicine, is captured in this statue outside the University of Illinois Medical Center at Chicago

Honor codes in medical schools go back at least 150 years, preceding even the Flexner Report of 1908. Approximately half of U.S. medical schools have honor codes and more schools are adopting them each year.

Medical school honor codes imply that ethically something

more is expected of one preparing to enter the unique profession of medicine. Indeed, the preamble of the UIC-COM Honor Code states, "upon matriculation I became

a member of the medical profession. My patients, colleagues and teachers will expect me to maintain and promote the ethical standards that my chosen profession implies."

The Code is distributed to all entering freshmen, its principles, and the obligation to conform to the Code are emphasized. The Code's preamble defines the Code itself and 12 articles spell out the mechanics of applying the Code in actual practice.

In an effort to assess the impact of the Honor Code on UIC-COM students, James McFadden, MD, and David Ramsey, M-3, under the guidance of faculty advisor Patrick Guinan, MD, (department of urology) interviewed 477 M1-4 students by means of a questionnaire.

QUESTIONS

	<u>Response</u> % YES
1 Were you aware that there is a UIC-COM Honor Code?	97%
2 Were you given a copy of the Honor Code?	75%
3 Are there objective standards of student conduct?	94%
4 Should students be bound by the Code?	95%
5 As a student I am a member of the medical profession	97%
6 Does the Code assume ethical standards?	99%
7 Is a judicial process provided for Code violations?	94%
8 Is expulsion a Code sanction?	84%
9 In your opinion do more than 25% of students cheat?	11%
10 Should the Code be discontinued?	3%

In the questionnaire the authors attempted to determine the extent of the Honor Code's acceptance and its impact on student attitudes in a single academic year. Unfortunately, over the years no follow-up survey had been done to gauge the extent of the Code's internalization or its impact on student behavior.

Discussion

It is assumed, by some, that in our goal-oriented culture, an ethical cynicism among college students would carry over to those who are accepted into medical school. This UIC-COM Honor Code questionnaire should allay some of these concerns.

In general the students were knowledgeable about the Honor Code (#1 & #2) and accepted its objective standards of ethical conduct (#3 & #4). Students recognized that they are members of the medical profession (#5). This membership is specifically spelled out in the Honor Code. Question #6 reinforces question #3 and is even more strongly supported (99% vs 94%). Question #7 and #8 acknowledge that penalties exist for violation of the Code. The reliability of question #9 is more problematic but suggests that cheating is not perceived to be a serious problem.

Finally, question #10 suggests that there is strong support among the UIC-COM students for the Honor Code.

In summary, this assessment suggests the UIC-COM Honor Code is meaningful for the students and provides an ethical standard for their academic and clinical conduct. ■