

SOCIO-HUMANITARIAN COMPETENCIES IN POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION OF DENTISTS

O.M. Manukhina

Ukraine, Zaporizhzhia, Zaporizhzhia State Medical and Pharmaceutical University

The issue of value orientations has gained particular relevance during periods of martial law, economic instability, and heightened stress. Value orientations serve as a mechanism for integrating societal values into individual behavior and professional activity, including that of physicians. They facilitate the systematization of knowledge and norms, promote self-realization, and influence the direction and content of social engagement. A clear understanding of values supports ethical decision-making and fosters a responsible attitude toward professional duties. This is closely associated with the acquisition of core and derivative competencies, including cognitive, emotional-volitional, social, civic, communicative, and professional competencies, among others [1, pp. 82–83].

The competency-based approach, which emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the ability to apply it in practice, is a cornerstone of modern medical education. International standards, including those of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), underline that a contemporary physician must demonstrate not only clinical proficiency but also high levels of ethical conduct, communication skills, adaptability, and teamwork. Consideration of human values is thus a critical imperative in healthcare. In the context of wartime challenges in Ukraine, physicians increasingly face emotional exhaustion, a growing number of stressful situations, and complex moral dilemmas. This requires a high level of psychological resilience, empathy, and collaborative competence—commonly referred to as “soft skills”—the development of which has become even more urgent [2, p. 13; 3, p. 494; 4, p. 211]. According to Order No. 650 of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine (as amended in 2025), healthcare professionals are required, at

least once during each certification cycle, to complete training across 6–7 core domains, including ethical issues.

The focus includes empathy, confidentiality, professional boundaries, and ethical dilemmas related to wartime practice, such as working with traumatized patients, families of military personnel, and internally displaced persons. The role of humanitarian values in medical education is becoming increasingly prominent in light of advances in medicine and information and communication technologies. Accordingly, there is a clear societal need to foster the professional culture of future physicians, particularly during wartime conditions [5, p. 24].

Soft skills are developed gradually through experience, observation, reflection, and role-based interaction, and they constitute competencies that develop throughout the entirety of a physician's professional life. Currently, there is no unified standard for the development of soft skills during internship training or other forms of postgraduate medical education [6, p. 155]. In response, the Department of Postgraduate Dentistry at Zaporizhzhia State Medical and Pharmaceutical University has initiated the integration of relevant components into existing curricula. Our observations indicate the need for a comprehensive approach to the formation of value orientations among dental interns, incorporating educational, social, and psychological aspects. Consideration of these factors contributes to the development of conscious, responsible, and socially active professionals prepared to meet contemporary challenges.

A key role in shaping values is played by the educator. The instructor's professional attitude, response to societal developments, level of expertise, cultural and linguistic competence, civic position, erudition, self-discipline, and personal example all contribute to the formation of appropriate value orientations among trainees [7, p. 76]. Teaching activities combine explanatory-reproductive, problem-based, interactive, and research-oriented methods. Particular attention is paid to creating an interactive and supportive learning environment in which interns, trainees, and instructors function as equal participants in the educational process. In the training of dental interns, special emphasis is placed on an interdisciplinary approach aimed at

broadening perspectives, fostering non-standard thinking, and developing problem-solving skills at the intersection of various fields, including economics, management, ethics, psychology, and sociology. In this context, continuous professional development of educators is essential, focusing on the adoption of modern scientific and technological advances, as well as the updating and deepening of knowledge in dentistry, andragogy, psychology, and teaching methodologies. Faculty members have also participated in activities within a Ukrainian-Swiss educational project, gaining experience from international colleagues.

The department actively employs interactive learning technologies, situational learning methods, and clinical case simulations. The impact of martial law, which has increased stress levels, along with the prolonged period of remote learning for students and interns, has, according to our observations, led to a decline in communication skills, including active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, feedback formulation, and the ability to convey complex medical information in accessible language. Business games and role-playing exercises effectively support the development of value orientations and professional competencies. Within these activities, interns sequentially assume the roles of attending physician, patient, patient's relative, clinic administrator, and member of a multidisciplinary team. Assessment encompasses not only dental "hard skills" but also the ability to demonstrate empathy, maintain composure, act under conditions of uncertainty, and collaborate effectively. Educators further support value formation and professional growth through coaching, including individual consultations and guidance. Regular progress assessment and feedback facilitate awareness of strengths and weaknesses and enable the adjustment of value orientations and career planning. An effective and promising approach to the acquisition and enhancement of soft skills at the postgraduate level is the use of virtual patients and standardized patient scenarios that simulate real clinical situations. Currently, faculty members perform the role of standardized patients. An important component is the development and continuous improvement of cognitive-reflective skills, including critical thinking, self-assessment,

acceptance of errors, and flexibility in decision-making. To support this, constructive error analysis and group reflection are conducted following simulation-based sessions.

The purposeful development of soft skills and the formation of value orientations constitute an essential component of modern professional training for dentists. This approach contributes to improving the quality of dental care delivery, fostering a culture of partnership in healthcare, and promoting the establishment of humanistic values.

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