

Embracing Epistemological Pluralism in the Modern Medical Era: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract:

Background: In the evolving landscape of medical education in the United States—especially in the post-pandemic context—medical schools are witnessing a decline in student attendance. Many students now rely heavily on digital platforms and third-party resources rather than attending traditional in-person sessions. This shift raises questions about how medical knowledge is understood, delivered, and valued.

Objective: This study explores epistemological pluralism—the idea that multiple ways of knowing can coexist—as a framework to better understand and address current challenges in medical education. It aims to bridge the gap between student learning preferences and faculty expectations while preserving the integrity of medical training.

Methods: We are conducting a qualitative and conceptual analysis of current educational practices, drawing on curriculum reviews, faculty interviews, and student feedback from a U.S. medical institution. The study will examine tensions between established teaching models and new learner behaviors. Specific attention will be given to how knowledge is constructed through different means: clinical reasoning, lived experience, narrative understanding, embodied practice, and digital engagement.

Based on these insights, we plan to pilot the development of pluralistic curriculum strategies, including:

- Case-based hybrid sessions combining real-time feedback and online flexibility
- Integration of narrative medicine and reflective practices into core teaching
- Faculty development workshops focused on pluralistic and adaptive pedagogies

Results/Proposed Approach: Preliminary findings are expected to suggest that embracing multiple ways of knowing fosters deeper student engagement, restores faculty-student connection, and supports the development of professional identity. Educators who will adopt a pluralistic teaching approach that will result in increased flexibility and improved rapport with learners. Students are expected to appreciate more meaningful and context-rich learning environments.