

## Objecting the Objective – How Passing the Person Fails Our Growth

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In a program overloaded by information and essential skills, objectives assist medical students in the self-directed triage of imperative take-home points and applicable details of clinical practice. From weekly small group sessions during the Pre-clerkship years to the daily clinical encounters of Clerkship, objectives present an expansive framework for continuous self-assessment and formal examination of the medical trainee. In Canada, the most widely-accepted framework of categorizing medical education and competency is presented by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) and known simply as CanMEDS [1].

Developed in response to a widely-cited need to provide medical trainees with a relevant framework to address evolving health concerns [2], CanMEDS is said to represent the “big picture” of medical education, assessment, and certification. In 1998, Educating Physicians for a Future Ontario (EPFO) conducted a five-year collaborative project in hopes of standardizing resident evaluation [3]. Eight physician competencies were identified and subsequently incorporated into five participating Ontario MD programs. Enduring several phases of development and refinement, the nearly 20-year old RCPSC CanMEDS framework enables Canadian medical institutions to emphasize framework-coherency as an objective standard of student assessment and physician competency [4]. Today’s framework is comprised of seven standards of practice: Medical Expert, Communicator, Collaborator, Leader, Health Advocate, Scholar, and Professional [1]. Despite the explicit removal of one of the eight original roles from today’s framework, the University of Ottawa, along with several other Ontario MD programs, has continued to house the abandoned eighth role: Person.

In a one-size-fits-all curriculum, comprised of standardized subsets of professional competencies, the Person role exists not within a framework of self-directed personal growth, but as part of a larger tool of idealized perfection. The issue becomes not of the role itself, but of the objectified curriculum which lacks the socially negotiated and contextual nature of the role’s definition.

Although objectives certainly help to formulate a simplistic means by which students may tangibly assess gaps in their knowledge, the biggest deterrent of meaningful education is built upon the objectives’ association with a Pass/Fail grading system (or as medical students like to say, “P=MD”). A grade devoid of increasing value above a specific threshold empowers students to place collegiality above competition. This also means that within a Pass/Fail system, objectives ultimately define the perimeter of failure and not excellence.

The detriment to medical students develops within the context of the curriculum’s perceived dichotomy of this role, where there is now an opportunity to not only “Pass” as a Person, but also to “Fail”. Where objectives focus on minimally acceptable levels of competence, they can provide pertinent guidance to ensure the integrity and provisions of the medical professional are maintained. Ultimately, it is the fine line between a “P” and an “F” that forms the premise of students’ engagement with curriculum objectives; whereby the fear of failure supersedes the drive to excel.

The idea of the Person role, as both a concept and a competency, is not inherently debilitating in the process of fostering a capable physician. When isolated from the medical school curriculum and the supposed measurable standards of competence, the Person role encourages the exam-driven medical student to take time for personal development and focus on those individualized activities that make for a well-balanced student. Within the confines of formal education, however, the Person role serves a counterintuitive outcome for the medical trainee.

When combined with competency-based education and objective standards of supposed failure, the Person role and the opportunity to explore individual growth becomes halted in the face of benchmark assessments. The competent medical trainee becomes defined by statutes of enablement, abided by those who successfully forgo the Person they once were (or could have been) in order to meet the measurable standard and receive a

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passing grade. To fully succumb to the normalization of educational objectives is to rob future patients of the intangible character traits that could enable medical students to develop into outstanding physicians.

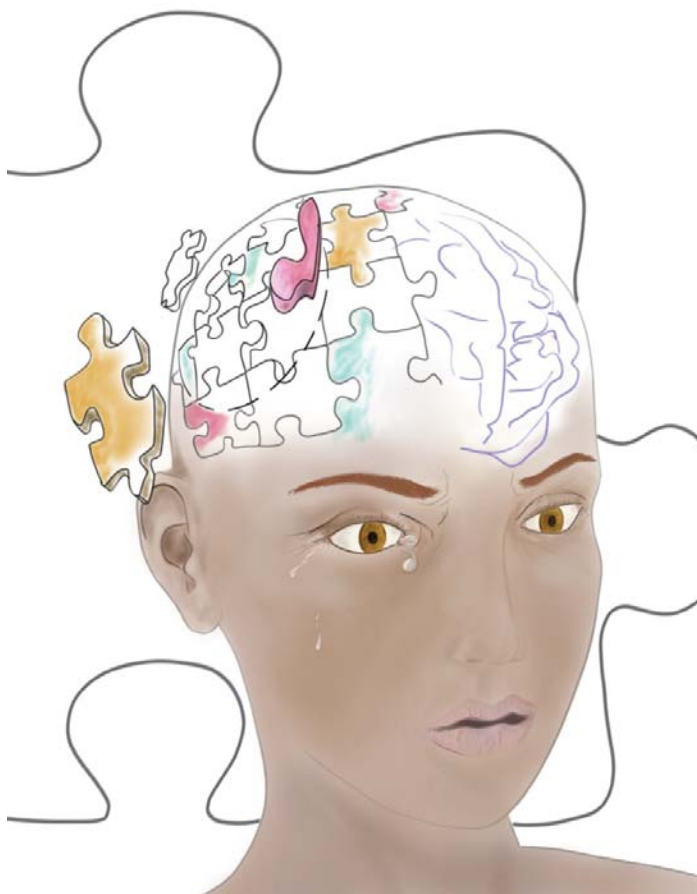
Our best weapon to combatting the well-documented loss of self and cynicism medical trainees experience as they progress through the curriculum is to create a culturally safe environment by which students can explore personal growth without the fear of constant assessment and failure [4]. Encouraging medical students to nurture their individual identities through self-reflective practice is important, but requires a medium abdicated of concrete expectations or gold standards. Reducing the role of the Person to accompany those components of training, which are comprised of reproducible measurements and checklists, does not aid in the development of individuality, but of empty competency dichotomized between a “P” and an “F”. If to “Pass” as a Person requires meeting prescribed conventions marked by the constant pressure to perform based on reductive standards, then perhaps failing this competency highlights the true objective of personal success.

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## Tears & Puzzle Pieces

Digital art

Julie El-Haddad

With the changes in attitudes towards mental health in Western society, we have seen an increase in awareness of the biochemical basis of certain psychological disturbances. However, we shouldn't forget that the human component of mental health remains the primary focus.

Avec tous les changements dans les attitudes par rapport à la santé mentale dans la société occidentale, nous avons remarqué une augmentation de nos connaissances sur les bases biochimiques de certains désordres psychologiques. Toutefois, nous ne devons pas perdre de vue l'aspect humain de la santé mentale.