

Empathy development of students in block clerkships compared to a longitudinal integrated clerkship

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Empathy

- Empathy in the physician-patient relationship is the physician's ability to recognize and understand a patient's perspective and experiences, and convey such an understanding back to the patient.
- From a social-psychological perspective, empathy is in the relationship between physician and the patient.

Review of Literature

- **Medical student empathy declines during medical school**
- **A significant decline occurs during the third year**
- **Students with higher baseline empathy have a slower rate of decline than those with lower baseline empathy**
- **Self-reported empathy wanes particularly in students entering technology-oriented specialities.**

Sanford School Of Medicine

- 56 students/year
- 3 clinical campuses
- Yankton Campus – LIC since 1991
- Sioux Falls and Rapid City – LIC - 2013

Purpose

- This study examines changes in empathy during the third year of medical school, comparing students in block clerkships with students in a longitudinal integrated clerkship.

Methods

- An electronic version of the Jefferson Scale of Student Empathy was emailed to at the Sanford School of Medicine during the summers of 2011 and 2012. Data were collected anonymously but students were listed by year of study and campus.
- Mean scores of beginning third year students (pre-test) were compared with scores from beginning fourth year students (post-test) to measure change during third year.

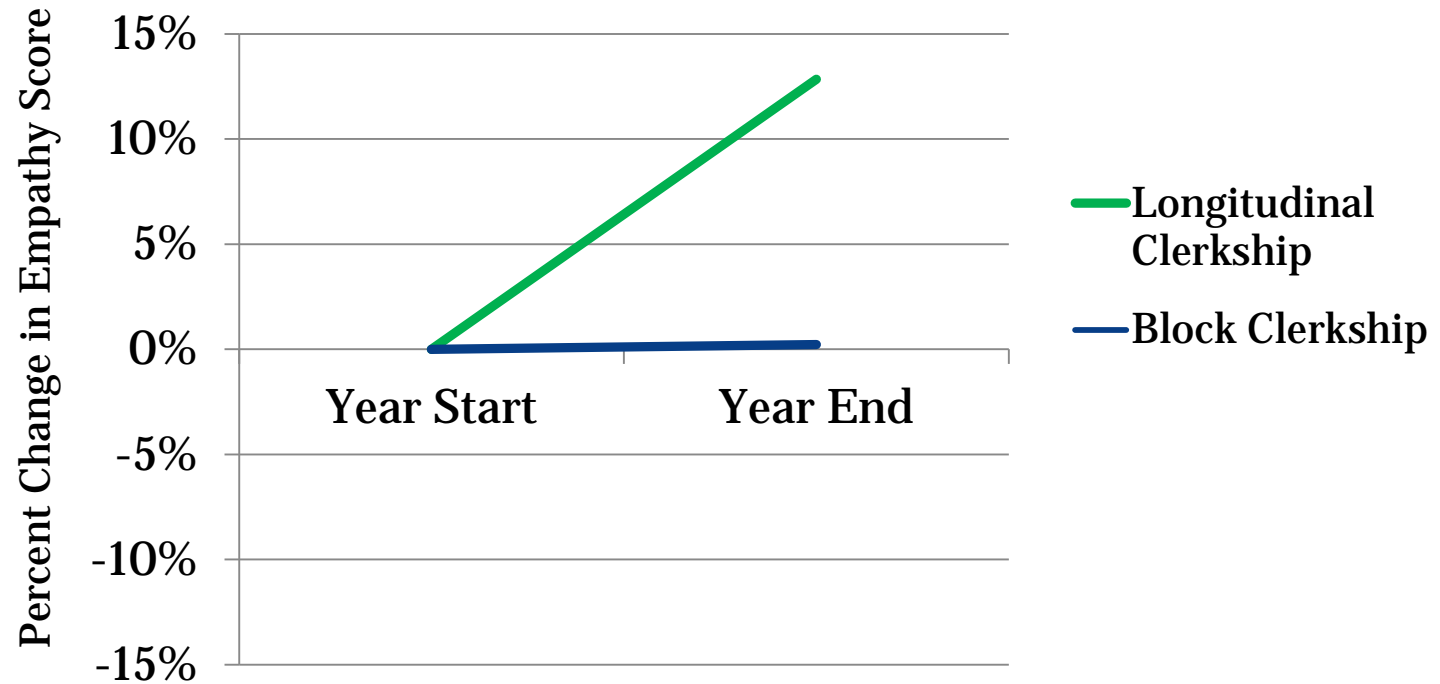
The Jefferson Scale of Student Empathy

- Intended for use with medical students and residents.
- 20 items rated on a 1-7 scale
- 15 items are positively stated
- 5 items are negatively stated (data reversed before scoring)
- Possible scores range from 20-140

Results

- Responses collected from 147 students
- LIC student response rate = 55% (22 students)
- Block Clerkship response rate = 68% (125 students)
- Students in block clerkships showed essentially no change (less than 0.5% increase)
- Students in a longitudinal integrated clerkship significant increase (greater than 12% increase)

Results

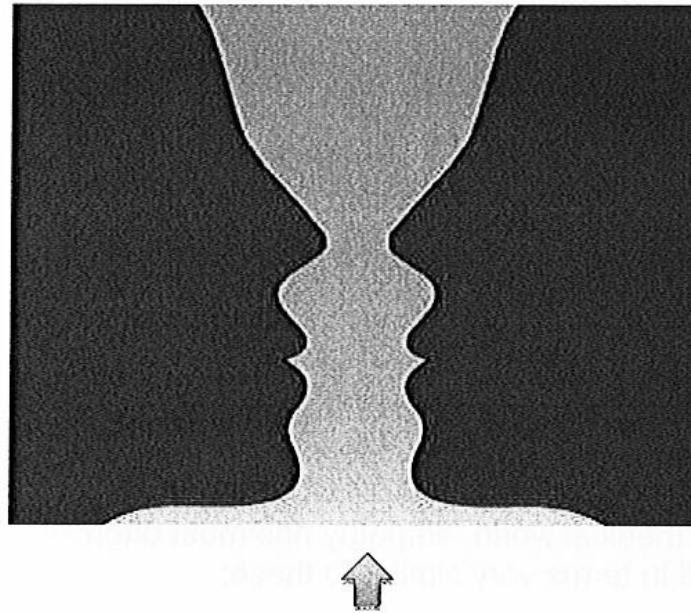


Change in LIC Empathy Year Start to Year End $p = 0.005$

Conclusion

- **Students in Longitudinal Clerkships show significant increase in empathy while students in block clerkships show no change.**
- **It is likely that empathy development is improved in the healthy long-term relationships found among students, faculty and patients in an LIC.**

Empathy is in the “social-relational space” between physician and patient



Social-Relational Space

Because empathy grows and exists in the “social- relational space” between individuals, it means that medical environments and situations need to cultivate openness and trusting relationships.

That growth requires time.

It requires opportunity.

It requires repetition.

The longitudinal model clearly supports the critical factors needed to cultivate empathy. That is, the model provides for:

- **Time (overall longer time periods with attending and with patients)**
- **Which, in turn, allows for opportunity to interact in the “social-relational space” with patients**
- **In multiple repetitions**

Future study is needed.