



Vol. I No. 18 Residents Assistance Program Newsletter April 2002

## Why Doctors Need

“Physician, *know* thyself!” might be some of the best advice around the medical profession today. Doctors who understand their own emotions and behavior, and who use that knowledge to relate to others, are more likely to achieve higher levels of career success.

There are some very real and practical advantages for medical professionals who have developed emotional intelligence, or EQ, in addition to their store of knowledge in science and technology.

Steven J. Stein, Ph.D., co-author of “The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success,” talked to RAP recently about what he and co-author Howard E. Book, M.D. learned about the factors that set successful physicians apart from their less successful colleagues.

Stein is a clinical psychologist and the founder and president of Multi-Health Systems, Inc. (MHS), a leading psychological-test publishing company. He is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto. Book is an organizational consultant

and psychiatrist, and an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto. Both frequently address groups on the topic of emotional intelligence.

“In our research on emotional intelligence, we looked at situations where physicians have derailed or been sued for malpractice, and we looked at their intrapersonal communication skills,” says Stein.

“What we found is that physicians are most likely to get into trouble in the areas of empathy and communication skills. The less successful physicians don’t take enough time to build rapport with their patients. Videotaped doctor-patient interactions show that rapport can effectively be established in about three minutes. But amazingly, many of the doctors we surveyed thought that was too much time to spend on building rapport,” says Stein.

When they considered the reasons physicians were most often sued for malpractice, Stein continues, “we found most of the cases arose *not* because of mistakes or negligence, but because of a doctor’s poor

When you are concerned about how to deal with emotional situations at work or at home, it can help to talk things out with a professional. We understand what you’re going through and we are trained to help you work through life’s challenges. The free, confidential Residents Assistance Program Hotline, (813) 870-3344, offered by Wood & Associates is as close as your phone.

communication with a patient or a patient’s family about something that happened.”

“Eighty percent of the complaints received about physicians by medical associations’ governing bodies are due to a deficit or breakdown in soft skills,” adds Book. “The complaints most often heard from patients about doctors were things like, ‘He wasn’t respectful,’ or, ‘He didn’t listen,’ or, ‘He was on the phone during my visit.’”

“So in terms of risk management, three minutes is not a big investment,” Book emphasizes, “compared to the cost of one malpractice suit.”

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## Money

If you're feeling overburdened by debt, you're not alone. A recent survey by the Resident Services Committee of the Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine, as reported by the Associated Press, found that 42% of medical residents surveyed had debt of at least \$50,000; 19% had debt of at least \$100,000 and 43% had a monthly disposable income of \$100 or less.

So what's the prescription for getting debt under control? In this issue and the next, we'll offer advice from the experts.

*Figure out how much you owe on your credit cards.* Make a list that includes the interest rates, total amounts you owe and minimum monthly payments. List the cards by the interest rates they charge with the highest rate first and so on.

*Keep the two cards with the lowest rates.* Cut up the others. Write to the card issuers and close the accounts. (But check the terms of use before you cancel. Some credit issuers charge higher interest rates on the remaining balance due to people who close their accounts. If this is the case on one of your cards, pay it off and then cancel.) If you don't have a card with an interest rate of less than 14%, get one. They're out there, but you have to look for them.

*Resolve that you will use your cards only for essentials over the next six months.* For other purchases, use cash or a debit card.

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## EQ, continued

### Five Traits Point to Success

Stein and Book say that five areas of emotional intelligence are most important for physicians to develop.

*Intrapersonal* – the ability to be aware of and manage your own emotions.

*Interpersonal* – the ability to be aware of the emotions of others (empathy) and get along with other people.

*Stress management* – the ability to deal and cope with stressful situations and control your impulses.

*Adaptability* – the ability to be a good problem solver, be flexible and 'get a handle on' what's going on.

*General Mood* – the ability to be optimistic and happy.

### EQ Important for Teamwork, Patient Compliance

Another strong reason for developing emotional intelligence is today's team-oriented medical setting, says Stein. "Intrapersonal skills and impulse control help physicians work more effectively as part of a team. A doctor who tends to 'lose it' in front of the nursing staff, for example, will suffer repercussions, including the loss of respect and the likelihood that staff will become less willing to assist."

Another benefit, says Book, is that doctors who are adept at soft skills will find they have fewer "problem patients," and have more success getting patients to comply with their advice.

### Techniques for Building Empathy

Drs. Stein and Book offer these exercises and others in their book "The EQ Edge: Emotional Intelligence and Your Success."

1. Ask someone you know well how they feel about a given topic—something as simple as a recent film, or an event in which both of you participated. Then let the conversation roll for five minutes. At that point, describe to the person your version of what they think and feel. You may be surprised to find a difference of opinion.
2. Stop and listen more to others. If someone's feelings and opinions are of value to you, check to see how accurately you've understood them.
3. Keep a journal of your correct and incorrect impressions of other people's feelings and thoughts. For each "miss," record why you think you were off the mark.
4. Before meeting someone important to you, prepare by thinking about your expectations of the person. Prepare, as well, for these expectations to be wrong. What would you like to accomplish as a result of the meeting? In which areas would you like to know more about this person?
5. During the encounter, focus on the other person. Make eye contact and pay close attention to facial expressions and body language. Check your interpretations by asking questions like 'Are you saying that...?'
6. After your meeting, review the results. What did you learn about the person? How did they feel about things that are important to you? What things were important to them? How can what you learned be useful in your future relationship? What did you do that let the other person know how you feel about them?