

Medical Leadership, Personal View

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Opinion

What exactly does “medical leadership” mean? To be honest, this made me ponder on that very question. For over a year I’ve been serving in the “Military Academy of Medicine” as a commander of a variety of courses - involving military trainings of dentists, dental assistants, nurses and more. I speak of the importance of being an officer in the medical corps of the IDF on a weekly basis and yet I came to the realization that I, myself, am not sure of its importance. The time I have spent thinking and planning before writing this essay has made me dig inside and eventually made me reach a better understanding of my role as a medical leader. Medical leadership can be divided into several parts.

One of the most important parts is medical professionalism. When I arrived for the first time at the dental clinic in a very distinct base on the Egyptian border, it took me two hours to place a filling in a patient’s tooth. However, the assistants listened to me and did what I told them not only because I had ranks on my shoulders or because I was older but firstly because they knew that I know what I’m doing. They had complete confidence in me as a dentist. In order to be a leader you first have to be a professional at your field. When a new doctor arrives at a battalion, he has to undergo a fast transformation-from his previous role as a medical doctor in civil life - he now needs to become acting commander of an entire medical department in the army. This transformation can be very hard, and it is natural for anyone to feel nervous in this situation. But something that helps a lot is medical professionalism. In the medics’ eyes, the new doctor is the best doctor in the army, and their expectations of him are very high. So is their trust in him. As long as he maintains a high professional level, he will have the respect of his soldiers, but if he fails to lead as a professional - he won’t be able to lead at all.

The second part of medical leadership is leadership per say. Meaning it is impossible to be a medical leader if you don’t have the qualities of a leader in general. It doesn’t matter in what field whether it’s in combat or in routine, if one can’t lead people, he will

not be able to lead as a medical leader. Much has been written about which qualities are desirable in a leader, and I’m sure everyone intuitively knows what makes a great leader of people. Medical leadership is no different - character, charisma, commitment, communication and courage are only some of many of the qualities desirable, and if too many of these qualities are lacking in a doctor - then no matter how professional he is, his leadership will be lacking.

The third part of medical leadership but in my eyes the most important one is emotional intelligence. As medical professionals - whether in the battlefield, at the dental clinical or at the operating room - we treat people. It is our duty to bring cure not only to the body but also to the soul. Humanity and compassion are obligatory qualities to every care-taker. People around us look at us and seek comfort and aid. When a hurting patient arrives at the emergency room and sees the doctor in his white coat, an immediate relaxation and comfort are provided. The expectation of the environment from us to be compassionate obliges us to be so if we want to lead. Soldiers, colleagues and patients will usually not follow a care provider who lacks humanity.

The last part of medical leadership is trust. As doctors in the military, we are often put under a lot of pressure - everyone is in a rush, endless patients, and at the same time we have to deal with the needs of our military commanders and peers. It is very important for a medical leader to know the strengths and weaknesses of their staff, and to trust them to do their job properly. People feel when you don’t trust them, and respond well if you trust them and place responsibility on their shoulders. A good medical leader knows when they can trust their staff to do things on their own, and at the same time won’t give them tasks that are beyond their ability.

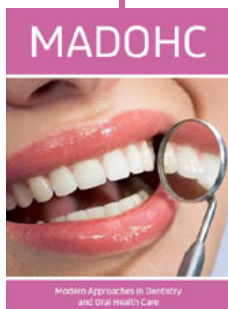
To conclude, true medical leadership is the ability to unite professionalism, charisma and humanity in one. Those qualities are both innate and acquired and can be trained and developed throughout life.



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