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Ethical-moral courses of action and active citizenship in health students

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Abstract

Introduction: The practice of active citizenship, ethical-moral courses of action and civic, moral and ethics education are essentials for ethical decision making in health. Objective: To determine if gender influences students' ethical- moral course of action. Methods: Descriptive study with a non-probabilistic sample of 85 students enrolled in the 1st cycle of the health degree. Results: Of the participants surveyed 61.2% were found to say that action should take into account their moral principles, with ethical/ moral subjectivism prevailing; 44.7% consider that one should "Do what will have the best consequences for the greatest number of people", with the principle of utilitarianism being significant; 55.3% think that "An action is ethically good" if "It is in accordance with morality", thereby highlighting subjectivism/relativism; 45.9% believe that "ethical-moral values" "are relative and vary from society to society" agreeing with relativism as an explanatory principle for action. Males showed a greater tendency to support their decision-making with the principle of objectivism, (Fischer=.010). Conclusion: The results suggest that students' ethical-moral education is required to promote an ethical-moral course of action in their professional practice. Thus, universities with their health courses should be at the forefront of this education, making their graduates ambassadors/interveners of a way of knowing and of being as well as promoters of the dignity of the citizen of the modern world.

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1. Introduction

Citizenship is a dynamic feature which should evolve following the progress of modern societies. The reinforcement of the idea of building solidarity and inclusive societies unleashes rising expectations of citizens in their rights and freedoms as well as the enforcement of civic participation as an integration via a social project that is intended to be equitable, binding, inclusive and fair. These postulates, therefore place new challenges on contemporary schooling.

A school exclusively oriented to knowledge cannot guarantee that the subjects of this education are both competent in performing professional duties and socially able to manage the space of rights and duties that society provides them. Hence, the gap felt by all who educate and aspire to develop other skills which need to be developed in young people, particularly in terms of ethics and moral education, character building, in short, of an education for values including training for active citizenship (Silva, 1999).

These facts mark out schools of higher education in health in a geostrategic transdisciplinary context, given the need to educate for ethical decision making and resolution of ethical dilemmas that health care often imposes. Thus, the assumption that “...the ethical concepts, morals, values, constitute the essential basis of our ethical-behavioural acting, either as individuals or as professionals or as researchers...” is accepted (Pedro, 2014, p. 484).

For this reason, the study of ethical-moral way course of action for health students is an issue that needs to be explored if we are to know how the ethical training of students occurs. It is closely related to moral education and to the development of critical thinking and reflection at university, playing a major role in the process of socialization, active citizenship and professionalization. (Frinkeler, Caetano & Ramos, 2012).

Ethical knowledge, considered moral behaviour, goes beyond simply knowing the rules or ethical codes of the profession, including voluntary actions which are deliberate and subject to judgment calls. This component is considered moral knowledge. It involves constant ethical judgment and implies confronting values /standards/interests/principles. Ethical knowledge does not describe/prescribe the decision, rather it provides insight about the possible choices to be made and why (Carper, 1978 cit in Silva & Batoca, 2003 cit in Cunha et al, 2013).

In this context, understanding of the issues on ethical knowledge requires distinguishing between various concepts, namely citizenship, ethics, morals, values, professional duties. They must therefore be conceptually clarified, enhancing differences as to their use in different normative-legal contexts to be established with significant consequences for the construction of theoretical knowledge and current practical knowledge (e.g. professional codes of ethics). (Pedro, 2014, p.497).

Strictly speaking, there is “citizenship” to designate a membership status of individuals to a politically articulated community and which grants them a set of rights and obligations. Although it is strongly “connected” to the dialectical notion of public and individual rights and duties, it has undergone many modifications as to its scope and nature especially in the last decade. Traditionally citizenship was understood as identity and belonging - at local,

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