

About the article entitled “Bioethics and digital environment: current challenges in medical education”

Castillo-Castro G^{1,a,b}; Proaño-Castro E^{1,a,b}

1 Universidad de San Martín de Porres, School of Human Medicine. Lima, Peru.

^a Master's degree in Health Services Management; ^b Undergraduate professor.

Dear Editor:

After reading the article by Luis Yushimito Rubiños, published in the most recent issue of this journal (2024-4), which explores a central theme in medical education—the integration of bioethics into the digital environment and the emergence of new forms of academic dishonesty driven by technology misuse—we deem it timely to reflect on the ethical challenges currently confronting medical education. This is particularly relevant given the rapid technological change, which demands ongoing vigilance to safeguard academic integrity.

The author's analysis of the causes of academic dishonesty, particularly in the context of technological advancement, identifies three likely scenarios: social pressure perceived by students, non-compliance with university regulations, and the extensive reach of new technologies ⁽¹⁾. According to Ríos-Teillier et al. ⁽²⁾, the university experience impacts students' well-being and mental health, as their coping mechanisms in a new and not always supportive environment often combine with the desire to meet the expectations of family and acquaintances. In this context, Rojas Reyes ⁽³⁾ notes that it is common for students to weigh the cost-benefit of engaging in dishonest practices, with decisions largely depending on the severity of potential penalties. Meanwhile, Khairatun and Miftahul ⁽⁴⁾ reported that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for text generation—particularly through platforms such as ChatGPT—has the potential to mislead readers, as its output often mimics human-written content with high fidelity. This phenomenon has raised significant concern within the academic community, given that the inappropriate or unethical application of such technology may constitute academic dishonesty.

Although academic dishonesty facilitated by technology is an emerging trend, its prevalence varies according to the type of academic activity ⁽⁵⁾. As noted in the editorial, such cases are most frequently observed in face-to-face assessments, classroom assignments, and tasks submitted through digital platforms ^(1,5). Thus, there is a higher likelihood of digital tools being misused in written work prepared during class, where verifying sources of information is more challenging ⁽⁵⁾.

In response to this situation—and following the educational changes prompted by the COVID-19 lockdown—many universities have adopted measures to mitigate academic dishonesty, such as the use of plagiarism detection softwares and secure exam browsers for online assessments. However, these strategies alone cannot eliminate such behaviors or the factors that foster them ⁽⁵⁾. Achieving meaningful results requires a comprehensive approach, that is, integrating deliberate and sustained actions into the institutional culture ⁽³⁾.

The implementation of the Bioethics Week at the Universidad de San Martín de Porres School of Human Medicine represents a valuable initiative that reflects an institutional commitment to the ethical formation of future physicians. This event aims to instill ethical and bioethical values from the earliest stages of medical education, not only to foster academic success but also to train professionals committed to truth and honesty ⁽¹⁾. All universities should promote similar initiatives, as they help establish a strong ethical culture that strengthens the academic environment and positively influences society.

Another strategy mentioned in the editorial underscores the importance of the involvement of the teaching staff, highlighting that the transmission of ethical values to students is essential for preventing dishonesty and fostering principle-based professional skills ⁽¹⁾. In this regard, it is worth noting that students' understanding of “academic integrity” encompasses not only the evaluation of their own actions but also the behaviors they observe in their instructors ⁽²⁾. As Lara et al. ⁽⁶⁾ affirm, the training provided in medical schools “is the result of the intense work of each person who is educated to care for the health of others.”

Corresponding author:

Gladys Castillo Castro
gcastilloc@usmp.pe

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Technological advancement is undeniably accelerating and attempting to halt it is unrealistic. AI is likely to offer as many benefits as challenges; ultimately, however, it is the user who determines how to harness it. For this reason, it is essential to motivate medical students to use this powerful tool ethically. When an educational institution establishes a clear vision of this landscape, it is better positioned to implement strategies that demonstrate to both students and staff that the cost-benefit of “cheating” is not worthwhile—particularly when considering that public trust in a country’s healthcare system also depends on the quality and integrity of its physicians ⁽⁷⁾.

In summary, this letter aims to provide a reflective perspective on the current challenges in medical education, emphasizing the importance of ethics in the academic sphere as discussed by Yushimito Rubiños. We further concur with the crucial role universities play in cultivating honesty and responsibility. Educational institutions play an active part in fostering academic integrity because, as noted, students are also influenced by what they observe and experience firsthand.

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