ABSTRACT

Objective: The ACGME Milestones in psychiatry evaluate residents as teachers of students, patients, and families. Further, the Milestones capture data on professionalism, including maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. To introduce residents to the idea of professional boundaries in teacher-student relationships, we developed a three-hour seminar involving facilitated discussion, case review, and self-study.

Methods: The seminar on boundaries occurred in two parts over two consecutive weeks for a total of three hours in the following format:

- **Facilitated discussion**: The medical student clerkship director, residency program director and a campus expert on boundaries met with residents in groups of 5 to discuss teacher-student boundary considerations. The session used ambiguous cases and asked residents to think through the nuances of each case. For example, did the age and gender of the student affect the resident’s opinion of what defined appropriate boundaries? The selected cases could be interpreted in multiple ways (i.e. there was no single right answer).

- **Homework**: Residents were asked to read “Teacher-Student Relationships in Medical Education: Boundary Considerations” by Plait and Baker, which outlines the ethical and professional considerations of teacher-student boundaries and uses real-world examples ranging from commonly encountered situations to rare situations that pose significant ethical dilemmas. They were given this assignment to complete before the second part of the seminar, which occurred the following week.

- **Case review**: After completing these assignments, each resident developed a hypothetical case on boundaries. Each case was exchanged with another resident in the group, who led the group discussion on ethical and professional boundaries.

Example Cases

- Student calls a resident after hours on their personal cell phone
- Resident hires the spouse of a student for home repair
- Student asks a resident for help with a workout routine
- Several students offer to help a resident move apartments
- Student sends resident a friend request on Facebook
- Student seeks out resident for advice on personal issues
- Resident invites students to their home for a pot-luck BBQ
- A student shares frustrations about a colleague with a first year resident who was a peer last academic year

CONCLUSION

Feedback from residents indicated the experience was a good use of time, taught new concepts, and would result in lasting behavioral change. Future study is needed to clarify best practices in this area.