

Med school to find new ways to test students

Lynne Williams and Lynette Hein, medical school information
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Does your doctor listen to you? In the days when the family doctor made housecalls, the primary method of diagnosis was to listen carefully to the patient. Modern-day physicians have an arsenal of diagnostic tools at their disposal. But have we lost something?

Tests abound to gauge a medical student's accumulated knowledge, but it is much more difficult to test their history taking and diagnostic skills. And, until recently, it has been impossible to test the intangibles such as empathy and compassion in the care of patients.

However, new strides are anticipated with the help of a \$200,000 grant from the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation. The University of Nevada School of Medicine, which along with the University of Washington School of Medicine and Oregon Health Sciences University, will form the Northwest Consortium for Assessment of Clinical Performance, will be involved in establishing standardized ways of measuring those skills. According to Peter Coggan, M.D., associate dean for medical education, the grant will allow the three schools to train and employ "standardized patients" (SPs) or actors who are trained to "act out" certain medical conditions. These "patients" will use scripts devised by a

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panel of physicians.

Dr. Daniel J. Klass, project director of the standardized patient project at the National Board of Medical Examiners, plans to add a section on doctor-patient relations to the licensing exam as early as 1995.

"They [medical students] should have skills that allow them to relate to patients well, to listen properly, to hear what's said, so the patient leaves the encounter thinking, 'Hey, I just saw a real doctor.'"

The Northwest Consortium will enable its member schools to share resources and give them a way to compare the progress of their respective students with the students at other medical schools.

The project will begin in January 1993.

For additional information, contact Lynne Williams in Reno at 784-6003 or Lynette Hein in Las Vegas at 383-2638.