

# An education on servant leadership: a medical student perspective

**Sir,**

We read with great interest the article by Cottey and McKimm (vol 80(4), 2019, p. 220; <https://doi.org/10.12968/hmed.2019.80.4.220>) regarding the potential role of and underappreciation for servant leadership in the NHS. As leadership has become an increasingly integral part of a clinician's role, we believe it is important for medical students to be equipped with its theoretical basis for their future practice.

We agree with the authors' assertion that servant leadership lacks recognition in NHS leadership education, despite its kinship to the core values of the NHS. Current teaching on leadership styles in medical schools places great emphasis on transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). We feel that as future leaders of the NHS, responsible for nurturing the next generation of doctors, medical students require a greater knowledge and understanding of leadership theory.

To further improve understanding of servant leadership, the authors suggest a compulsory leadership module for medical students. One author (AR) participated in a 'Leadership Theory and Practice' module during an intercalated BSc in Health Care Management, in which leadership theory seminars were paired with group tasks, providing an opportunity to develop and reflect on leadership skills. We think that a similarly structured module, with a specific emphasis on the health-care setting, would provide medical students with a foundation of knowledge and skills required in their future clinical practice – helping them to become tomorrow's doctors (General Medical Council, 2018).

**Asma Raheem**

*Medical Student  
GKT School of Medicine  
King's College London  
London SE1 1UL  
(asma.raheem@kcl.ac.uk)*

**Aayenah Yunus**

*Medical Student  
GKT School of Medicine  
King's College London  
London*

**Sarah Khan-Ruf**

*Medical Student  
GKT School of Medicine  
King's College London  
London*

Bass BM. 1990. From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organ Dyn.* 18(3):19–31.  
General Medical Council. 2018. Outcomes for graduates. (accessed 31 July 2019) [https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/outcomes-for-graduates-a4-20190717\\_pdf-78071845.pdf](https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/outcomes-for-graduates-a4-20190717_pdf-78071845.pdf)

**Sir,**

We are very pleased to respond to the letter from Raheem et al regarding our article.

While our article was intended to promote the value of taking a servant leadership approach as a central perspective in health care, we fully agree that undergraduate medical programmes must pay more attention to the inclusion of key leadership and management theories and concepts in the curriculum. This viewpoint is endorsed not only in the General Medical Council's (2018) publication *Outcomes for Graduates*, as these authors note, but explicitly in the Faculty of Medical

Leadership and Management's (2018) indicative undergraduate curriculum on medical leadership and management. While *Outcomes for Graduates* does specify that graduates should be able to demonstrate understanding of 'leadership theories' and how these apply in practice, neither of these documents sets out which theories, concepts and models should be included, and this is the challenge for educators, many of whom have not yet had formal training in leadership development.

Despite this lag, we see the huge enthusiasm of students and doctors in training in pushing for their own leadership development. With the backing of key organizations, we hope that this will soon become part of all schools' core curricula, giving students an evidence base and practice-based case examples to prepare them more effectively for becoming the health-care leaders of the future.

**Judy McKimm**

*Professor of Medical Education and Director of Strategic Educational Development  
Swansea University Medical School  
Swansea SA2 8PP  
(j.mckimm@swansea.ac.uk)*

**Laura Cottey**

*Academic Clinical Fellow Emergency Medicine  
University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust  
Plymouth  
Devon  
Academic Department of Military Emergency Medicine  
Royal Centre for Defence Medicine  
Birmingham*

Faculty of Medical Leadership & Management. 2018. Medical leadership and management. An indicative undergraduate curriculum. (accessed 11 August 2019) <https://www.fmlm.ac.uk/sites/default/files/content/news/attachments/Medical%20leadership%20and%20management%20-%20an%20indicative%20undergraduate%20curriculum.pdf>  
General Medical Council. 2018. Outcomes for graduates. (accessed 11 August 2019) [https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/outcomes-for-graduates-a4-20190717\\_pdf-78071845.pdf](https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/outcomes-for-graduates-a4-20190717_pdf-78071845.pdf)

## Correspondence

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in British Journal of Hospital Medicine, please write in no more than 250 words to:

Professor Rob Miller, Editor-in-Chief, BJHM, and submit online at [www.edmgr.com/bjhm](http://www.edmgr.com/bjhm)

If you have any queries, please contact the Editor, Rebecca Linssen on 020 7501 6718 or [Rebecca.linssen@markallengroup.com](mailto:Rebecca.linssen@markallengroup.com)

BRITISH JOURNAL OF  
HOSPITAL  
MEDICINE