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Is medical school a mind changer? A longitudinal study of student's personality traits

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Background & Aim: To determine if the six years of Medical Schools are accompanied by significant changes in self-perceived personality traits of medical students.

Method: In this longitudinal study, Revised NEO Personality Inventory was filled by 70 students from the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Coimbra, Portugal, at two moments: at the beginning of the university's first year and at the end of sixth year. Changes in personality domains and facets from year 1 to year 6 were calculated.

Results: There were significant changes in the average personality profile of this sample of medical students during the six years of Medical School. Neuroticism decreased significantly, while Agreeableness and Conscientiousness suffered small but significant decrease. This includes significant decreases in the average scores for the facets Anxiety ($p < .01$), Depression ($p < .05$), Vulnerability ($p < .05$), Altruism ($p < .05$) and Modesty ($p < .05$). There was also a significant increase in Self-discipline facet ($p < .05$).

Conclusions: Given the results we can conclude medical school influences students' personality traits' evolution. Students' decrease in their self-assessment of Anxiety, Depression and Vulnerability facets indicates they may perceive themselves as more stable, confident, hopeful and resilient in the end of the academic course. Their increase in Self-Discipline may point to an increase confidence in their ability to in the future continuously update the knowledge they received in order to provide always the best for their patients. However, their self-assessment decrease in personality's facets Altruism and Modesty could be concerning - these findings could suggest that medical students may have developed a more arrogant and overrated vision of themselves in relation to others, and also that they may have become more reluctant to get involved with others' problems.