

Title: First-year medical students attracted by primary health care present specific personal characteristics.

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Background:

In Switzerland, like in many EU countries, an insufficient proportion of students are choosing primary health care (PHC) as a career, and worries are expressed about shortage of these physicians in the near future. We investigated the proportion of first-year medical students spontaneously attracted by PHC, and whether they present specific personal characteristics.

Summary of work:

Geneva Medical school first-year students (N=355) self-reported their career intentions (PHC vs other specialties), level of motivation to become PHC physicians in the future, and personal characteristics (empathic capacity, personality, stress coping, and motivation type). A multivariate analysis of variance was run to compare students attracted by PHC and by other specialties.

Summary of results:

Among students, 30% declared being highly motivated for PHC but only 11% intended to be trained as PHC physicians, women being significantly more interested than men (15 and 5% respectively, Chi-square $p=0.045$). Students attracted by PHC significantly differed from the other students (Manova $p=0.006$): they were more motivated by care ($p=0.049$) and intrinsic reasons, such as altruism or mission ($p=0.025$), and relied more on avoidance behaviors to cope their stress ($p=0.046$).

Conclusions:

Results at one medical school confirm that the proportion of first-year students interested by a PHC career is insufficient to meet the needs of the population (about 50%). PHC candidates are mainly female, caring and intrinsically motivated students.

Take-home message:

Since not enough medical students intend to become PHC physicians when they start their undergraduate training, encouragement strategies would be needed to meet population needs. The specific personal characteristics of students spontaneously attracted by PHC could be clues to identify and motivate students to this career.