

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Warwick		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D30 - Philosophy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Professional Virtues and Vices in Modern Medicine: Enhancing GPs' understanding of medical generalism and the professional virtues that enable the delivery of excellent generalist care.		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2015-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b> Quassim Cassam		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Quassim Cassam	Professor of Philosophy	01.01.2009 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>International consensus recognizes the need to strengthen generalist medicine within modern health systems. However, there is no commonly agreed account of excellence in general practice. Professor Quassim Cassam has used his research on professional virtues and vices to develop an innovative practice-focused model of excellence in UK general practice which has been influencing established and trainee GPs since 2016. Underpinned by his theory of generalist excellence, Professor Cassam's free online toolkit is lending qualified and trainee GPs the tools with which to cultivate their practice and encourage personal reflection and resilience in an increasingly pressurised and target-driven healthcare system. The toolkit has since been adapted into an eLearning module by the Royal College of General Practitioners. These resources, along with bespoke workshops and training sessions, are positioning Professor Cassam as a leading source of authority for the GP community on enabling excellence in generalist medicine.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Professor Cassam's research since 2016 has focused on epistemic <i>virtues</i> and <i>vices</i>. This research was funded in part by an AHRC Leadership Fellowship and resulted in a book, <i>Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political</i> (3.1). In this work he proposes that epistemic vices (e.g. closed-mindedness, intellectual arrogance, dogmatism) are personal qualities that systematically obstruct the gaining, keeping or sharing of knowledge. He calls this theory <i>Obstructivism</i>. Epistemic virtues (e.g. intellectual humility, conscientiousness, diligence), in contrast, are attitudes, traits or ways of thinking that systematically abet the gaining, keeping or sharing of knowledge.</p> <p>He defines professional virtues as those personal qualities that enable members of a given profession to fulfil their professional role to a high standard, to achieve the goals of their profession, and to meet their professional challenges (3.4). Professional virtues are role-relative (3.1). In medicine, identifying the professional virtues of the medical generalist requires an understanding of the nature of medical generalism.</p> <p>Professor Cassam proposes a new theory of medical generalism, based on an original account of its goals, challenges, orientation, ways of working, knowledge and values. He proceeds to identify 10 distinctive virtues of medical generalism: attentiveness, curiosity, lucidity,</p>		

detachment, humility, resilience, empathy, self-trust, situational judgement and epistemic justice. He also identifies means by which such virtues can be cultivated (3.1).

Professor Cassam defines professional vices as personal qualities that obstruct the delivery of excellent generalist care. In his papers 'Stealthy Vices' (3.3) and 'Diagnostic Error, Overconfidence and Self-Knowledge' (3.2), he argues that: (a) overconfidence and arrogance are among the professional vices of some members of the medical profession; (b) this partly explains relatively high levels of diagnostic error; and (c) these vices are stealthy, that is, hidden from the people whose vices they are. Professor Cassam also identifies a category of institutional vices. These are institutional rather than personal obstacles to the delivery of excellent generalist care. Such obstacles include time-constraints and an over-emphasis on targets.

According to the Royal College of GPs, generalist medicine is person-centred. Professor Cassam develops a new theory of what person-centred care is, the professional virtues that facilitate its delivery, and the professional and institutional vices that obstruct its delivery (3.4, 3.1, 3.2). Person-centred care involves viewing patients from a second-person rather than third-person perspective (as 'you' rather than 'he' or 'she') and as unique particulars rather than mere instances of some general type.

The ability to view and treat patients in this way is itself one of the key professional virtues of general practice. In practical terms it involves being willing to engage in a genuine dialogue with patients and to relate to them as individual subjects rather than as biological organisms who happen to have a particular disease or illness. It involves engaging with patients' subjectivity, which in turn requires empathy. These are qualities that can and should be cultivated in general practice (3.1, 3.2).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Professor Cassam has published his research in monographs and in peer-reviewed journals, as well as producing a webpage for his practice based research toolkit for GPs:

**3.1 Cassam, Quassim** (2019) *Vices of the mind: from the intellectual to the political*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780198826903

**3.2 Cassam, Quassim** (2017) *Diagnostic error, overconfidence and self-knowledge*. Palgrave Communications, 3. 17025. doi:10.1057/palcomms.2017.25

**3.3 Cassam, Quassim** (2015) *Stealthy vices*. Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective, 4 (10). pp. 19-25. <http://wp.me/p1Bfq0-2na>

**3.4 Cassam, Quassim** (2019) 'Professional Virtues in Modern Medicine' website: <https://www.medicalvirtues.co.uk/>.

**3.5 Cassam, Quassim** (2016) *Vice epistemology*. The Monist, 99 (2). pp. 159-180. doi:10.1093/monist/onv034

AHRC Funding: **Cassam, Quassim**. Vice Epistemology. Ref: AH/M011089/1. April 2016 - October 2017 (**GBP199,931**)

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Since 2017 Professor Cassam has developed a strong and unique relationship with the national GP community in the context of his work on excellence in general practice. In so doing, he is impacting GP practice with a view to ultimately enhancing the patient experience. Through his workshops, his participation in GP training and his online toolkit, Professor Cassam's research is changing GPs' understanding of medical generalism and its underpinning excellences. Over 300 GPs and trainee GPs have already benefited from his research throughout the country. As of 31 December 2020, there have been over 2,300 unique visitors to his online toolkit, and in June

2020 the Royal College of GPs (RCGP) launched an eLearning module based on Professor Cassam's research.

### **Challenging preconceptions: Engaging established GPs with new ideas:**

Professor Cassam is a pioneer in vice epistemology, a field which he named in 2016 (3.5). He is one of the first philosophers to have systematically applied philosophical insights about virtues and vices to the understanding of excellence in general practice. An RCGP eLearning module based on his research (5.1) is described by the College as introducing a set of concepts 'that will enable healthcare professionals to reflect upon and enhance their practice'.

The first stage in achieving the stated impacts involved a workshop for 45 delegates entitled 'Virtues and Vices in Evidence Based Clinical Practice' held at the University of Oxford in January 2016 and organised jointly with Professor Trish Greenhalgh, Professor of Primary Health Care at Oxford (5.2). This was followed in February 2017 by a workshop for 40 delegates on Professional Vices in Modern Medicine held at the University of Warwick (5.3). A third event on Professional Virtues in Modern Medicine was held at the University of Warwick in November 2018 (5.4).

Each of these events included senior GPs as speakers, including GP educators and the Vice Chair (Professional Development) of the RCGP. The second workshop also featured an acclaimed presentation by Julian Treadwell, the vice-chair of the Royal College's Overdiagnosis group. Two of the events were addressed by Iona Heath, past President of the Royal College and a world leading authority on the theory and practice of medical generalism.

Responses to the feedback questionnaires from these events highlighted the changes in thought and potential for impact on professional practice that the workshops prompted (5.5; 5.6; 5.7). **The following examples are from practicing GPs:**

Question: Has this event inspired you to take any further actions in your professional practice/ place of work?

Answers: (a) 'More deprescribing'; (b) 'Has contributed to the preparation I need to do for my appraisal' (c) 'I am planning to feedback on this workshop at a clinical meeting in our practice. I might take the opportunity to provide a session about professional virtues and vices for a GP training session' (d) 'Use guidelines even less' (e) 'It has affected my practice'.

Question: Has this workshop inspired you to take any further actions in your professional practice?

Answers (a) 'I would like to take the ideas I got today to my partners and GP trainees'; (b) 'Yes, I want to go back and share with other trainees how important wisdom, patience and ATTENTION are to our role as GPs; (c) 'I will feel vindicated in my decisions to often not do anything overtly "medical" in my consultations; (d) 'Definitely, I am considering a post CCT fellowship to expand my knowledge in this field'; (e) 'Yes, there are lots of things to take back to my everyday consultations'.

Question: What one thing will you take away from this workshop?

Answers (a) 'Over diagnosis and over medication are very complex issues and vices and virtues are one way of examining this complexity'; (b) 'To try to build up the self-esteem of those around me who are arrogant'; (c) 'The take home message for me was about the delicate negotiations needed in communicating uncertainty to patients in the context of a caring relationship'; and finally, (d) 'Philosophers can help us think more clearly about stuff'!

### **Nurturing the future: Educating trainees and their trainers**

Whilst the workshops were a key first step towards instilling the concepts of vice and virtues into the profession, for such practice to become truly embedded, it is crucial that they are introduced to GPs as early as possible in their careers, particularly as they transition to general practice

from the hospital-based specialist model of medical training. Following the Professional Vices event Professor Cassam was invited to give a one-day training session at the Wythenshawe Hospital for a large group of ST3 medical students in their final year of postgraduate GP training. The session took place in July 2017 and its success resulted in this becoming an annual event which continues today. Feedback from participants on Professor Cassam's contribution included: 'Brought a completely different perspective'; 'Useful insight into philosophy and concepts'; 'Clear explanation of philosophical arguments without trying to influence us' (5.8).

Professor Cassam's work with the RCGP also identified a pressing need for a dedicated web resource giving GPs access to the latest thinking on medical generalism and professional virtues and vices. Professor Cassam's website (3.4) is that resource: Professional Virtues in Modern Medicine. This website serves as a free 'go to' resource for GPs to keep up with the latest thinking in this important area and thus enhance their practice. It is becoming increasingly embedded into the national GP community, with over 2,300 unique visitors recorded up to 31 December 2020 (5.9). Practising GPs and GP trainers have commented: (a) 'As a GP trainer this resource is something that will be really helpful for those entering postgraduate GP training, and one that I will certainly share with my GP trainees and colleagues' (b) 'a framework for reflecting on what it is we do and those important virtues that contribute to doing the job well' (c) 'This is a fantastic collection of reflections on generalism, and the virtues and vices thereof.... This resource will help me as a medical educator as I introduce generalists to the deeper implications of their work and the higher order skills and virtues that they will need to cultivate. Thank you' (5.9).

In June 2020, the RCGP launched a professional development eLearning module based on the content of the website (5.1). Since then, it has been accessed by 93 unique users (5.10). As Covid-19 places an even greater strain on a healthcare system already under extreme pressure, Professor Cassam's interventions could not be timelier. With social distancing measures now requiring many GPs to undertake consultations by telephone or even through car windows, personal resilience and the ability to convey empathy and humanity to patients in a heightened state of anxiety is crucial to the maintenance of excellent care in challenging circumstances.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 RCGP eLearning module 'Professional virtues in modern medicine' webpage.
- 5.2 'Virtues and Vices in Evidence Based Clinical Practice' workshop report.
- 5.3 'Professional Vices in Modern Medicine' conference poster.
- 5.4 'Professional Virtues in Modern Medicine' workshop webpage.
- 5.5 Feedback forms from the Professional Vices in Modern Medicine event.
- 5.6 Feedback forms from the Professional Virtues in Modern Medicine event.
- 5.7 Letters and emails from participants in these two events.
- 5.8 Feedback from 2018 and 2019 Manchester training events.
- 5.9 Online toolkit user statistics and feedback.
- 5.10 Completion data from the RCGP eLearning module.