

Episode: Author Interview: “How Should Medical Schools Foster Equity and Inclusion in Admissions?”

Guest: Adela Valdez, MD

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Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative format for accessing the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Adela Valdez, Associate Dean for the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Health Equity and Associate Dean for the Continuing Medical Education Program at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine in Edinburg. She’s here to discuss her article coauthored with Lala Forrest, Alessandra Jimenez, and Dr Kim-Thu Pham, [How Should Medical Schools Foster Equity and Inclusion in Admissions?](#), in the December 2021 issue of the Journal, *Health Justice and Diversity in Medical School Admissions*. Dr Valdez, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast. [music fades]

DR ADELA VALDEZ: No, actually, the pleasure is mine. Thank you for inviting me.

HOFF: So, to begin with, what is the main ethics point of the article that you’re contributing this month?

VALDEZ: Well, it was actually very hard to decide because there were so many ethical issues that really came to light in the case report that we talk about in this article. But if I would say the one thing that stood out for me was that medical schools and medical school admissions committees are excluding structurally competent students, and other students actually, from scholarships based on a very narrow definition of merit.

HOFF: Mm, mmhmm. And when you say, “structurally competent students,” can you expand on that just very briefly?

VALDEZ: Yes, socially competent students would be those that can identify with the population at hand that they’re serving and have also experienced the social determinants of health and those things that I think will make the, those qualities and skills that will make them be more structurally competent within the context of the mission of the school, which is really ultimately taking care of patients.

HOFF: And what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take away from your article?

VALDEZ: I think what they should take away is that medical schools are evolving, and in that evolution, they’re really trying to move forward on a national way to address institutional and structural biases. Some schools are better at it than others in some areas better than others. And so, what I would ask them to do is to be diligent in selecting a school that best meets their personal mission and goals and a school that has a history of

advancing all students to succeed through their processes, and more importantly, their inclusive cultures.

HOFF: Wonderful. And finally, if you could add one point to your article that you don't feel like you got to fully explore in the article as published, what would that be?

VALDEZ: I think we in leadership that are making these type of decisions should always make an effort to put a pause button, and that is if we're dealing with curriculum, if we're dealing with admissions, and any area in which there could be an issue of equity. Because we always need to put that equity lens in whatever we're doing because it'll have many more impacts than we think they can. And that includes policies and procedures that might be well-intended and well-meaning but might have some negative consequences. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Mm, mmhmm. Well, Dr Valdez, thank you so much for being on the podcast and for your contribution to the Journal this month.

VALDEZ: Namaste.

HOFF: To read the [full article](#) and the rest of the December 2021 issue for free, visit our site, JournalofEthics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.