



# Holocaust Education in Medical School Curricula: A View from Medical Students following a Study Trip to Auschwitz

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## Introduction

There is a significant need for medical ethics training in medical education and an essential modality for doing so entails analysis of physicians during the Holocaust. By confronting the atrocities during the Holocaust in which physicians were complicit, as well as learning about the moral courage of physicians who resisted the Nazi regime, medical students have the opportunity to learn about this tragic history and reflect on its implications for personal and professional identity formation as future physicians. In June 2022, 19 OUWB students and faculty embarked on the inaugural trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps in Poland in order to further this line of learning. OUWB was the first US medical school to take students to Auschwitz.

## Aims and Objectives

- Provide opportunities for students to gain a better understanding of the historical underpinnings of medical ethics and the role physicians played in perpetrating atrocities during the Holocaust.
- Create space for students to reflect on how medicine, and their own careers, can be used to prevent a misuse of power like seen in the Holocaust.
- Share key takeaways from the trip through the creation of presentations given to fellow medical students, medical professionals, and community members.

## Approach/Process



The trip to Poland was six days, which were spent seeing the Jewish ghettos in Krakow, Auschwitz I and Birkenau camps, and the town of Oswiecim. Students also had the chance to experience Jewish and Polish cuisine and culture.



Tours were led by Holocaust historians who provided crucial information on the role physicians played during the Holocaust. The group was even allowed in Block 10 of Auschwitz I camp, where medical experimentation took place.



A memorable moment for many students was having a Holocaust survivor, Lidia Maksymowicz, speak to the group about her experience as a child in Dr. Mengele's medical experimentation program in Block 10.



At the end of each day touring the camps, students and faculty would gather for a discussion about their thoughts and feelings, connections to current events, and how they plan to use lessons learned in their future as physicians.

## Evaluation Plan

Students had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to work in groups to develop projects to share what they learned with the OUWB, OU, and local communities. The insights represented in these presentations illustrate the impact of the trip on the students' ethical sensibilities and professional identities. The presentation *The Impact of Death: Lessons from the Holocaust on Coping in Modern-Day Healthcare* is pictured here.



## Results

By the end of the trip, students reported increasing clarity about how they can extend the lessons learned and the moral questions posed during their week in Poland into contemporary medical practice and advocacy. In particular, they connected their insights to a range of contemporary issues in health and medicine, an understanding of the significance of physician moral development, and the essential role of empathy in patient care.

## Discussion

The OUWB study trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau addressed the need for greater inclusion of medicine and the Holocaust into medical education, allowing for critical analysis of both historical and modern-day healthcare and resulting in important student insights to a range of contemporary issues in health and medicine, an understanding of the significance of physician moral development, and the essential role of empathy in patient care. Going forward, OUWB will continue to bring cohorts of students to Poland for this impactful learning experience.



Credit to Andrew Dietderich for joining the trip to Poland and photographing the tours, discussions, and emotions.