

Episode: **Author Interview: “What Does It Mean for Medical School Admissions to Be Socially Accountable?”**

Guest: Mark Henderson, MD, FACP

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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 Mark Henderson, a Professor of Internal Medicine and Associate Dean of Admissions at the University of California Davis School of Medicine, where he also holds the Dean's Endowed Chair in Teaching Excellence. He's here to discuss his article coauthored with Dr Charlene Green and Candice Chen, [What Does It Mean for Medical School Admissions to Be Socially Accountable?](#), in the December 2021 issue of the Journal, *Health Justice and Diversity* in medical school admissions. Dr Henderson, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast.

DR MARK HENDERSON: Thanks so much for having me today, Tim.

HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point of the article?

HENDERSON: I think the main ethical principle illustrated or discussed in the article is justice, which simply stated, is the equitable and appropriate treatment of people. If you think about the medical school admissions process, it's not an entirely just one in the sense that certain individuals have been excluded from it and continue to be excluded from it, while others are essentially advantaged in that process. So, what we discuss in the article is the concept of social accountability as a guiding principle for medical schools to address this injustice, if you will. By social accountability, I mean the contributions of an institution's programs, its graduates, its faculty in addressing needs of society. In the case of medical education, I would say enhancing diversity in the workforce is a means to reducing health disparities and improving health, particularly in underserved communities.

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

HENDERSON: I think a couple of points there. I think the most important thing is that the way we attach value to individuals in the medical school admissions process, as well as the way we attach value to institutions such as medical schools, is fundamentally flawed in a number of ways and is subject to all kinds of influences that don't necessarily correlate to quality. So, again, the quality an individual or value that an individual would bring to medicine, for instance, cannot be boiled down to a grade point average or a result on a high-stakes examination, just as the merit or the quality of an educational institution cannot be boiled down to a simple metric like a rating from the *US News and World Report*.

HOFF: Great. And to wrap up, if you could add a point to your article that you don't feel you got the chance to fully explore, what would that be?

HENDERSON: Sure. I think the most important additional point I would make is that when you're in the business of producing a workforce to meet the needs of society or altering that workforce to be better equipped to meet the needs of society, it's a long and arduous process. And I think many times people involved in admissions in higher education and other educational endeavors don't realize what a long and difficult process this is to actually effect a change. So, you have to have a certain amount of staying power, perseverance, and inspiration to keep going with this kind of work. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Mmhmm. Well, Dr. Henderson, thank you for your and your coauthors' contribution to this work and for being on the podcast today.

HENDERSON: Thanks so much for having me, Tim. I enjoyed it.

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