



Letter to Editor

Humanities in Medical Education: Definition, Benefits and Application

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The Medical Humanities provide an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the profound effects of illness on individuals and the social worlds in which they live. Humanities in medical education may offer significant potential benefits to personal future physicians and to the medical community as a whole. The meaning of medical humanities in medical education, reasons, benefits, ways of teaching and developing the humanities in medical school are explained.

A deepening professional concern for the moral dilemmas posed by new medical capabilities and an awareness of the need to guarantee the humanistic essentials of medical care against erosion by its increasingly technological aspect initiate teaching humanities in medical schools (1).

Medical humanities is an interdisciplinary field of medicine which includes the humanities, social science, arts and their usage in medical education and practice (2). The meaning of humanity is humane feeling such as sympathy, empathy, compassion, pity, and caring. Medical humanities usually define by subjects and fields, and no unique

definition is possible (3). It sometimes means a substitute for medical ethics, decision making, communication skills, or even behavioral sciences (1). Medicine is turning today to the humanities because it needs this specific kind of knowledge to teach empathy for the sick, suffering, and dying.

The medical humanities provide an inter professional approach to deep understanding the human condition, suffering, patients, health professionals, and the community which is around them (3). Considering the humanities in medical education train more open-minded doctors who are relate better to their patients and understand their points of view which lead to delivering the health service with more quality (2). In recent decades, there have been many attempts to teach the humanities in medical universities, and such teaching has been growing over the past years.

Different methods including giving lectures in class, observing the empathic behavior, role playing (4), studying patient's narratives of the disease, reading of 'great books' or perhaps excerpts from literary classics on medical topics, poetry,

novels, watching photos, videos, sculptures or listening to music (5), and analyzing audio or video records of patients encounters with professional health cares (3) have been suggested for teaching medical humanities (5). The best approach is experience clinical cases and illustrate the dilemmas encounter in real clinical practice. Cases must select carefully with clear questions which lead to deeper understanding (5). An experienced and interested clinician to ethical questions must work with a humanist or ethicist who knows the difficulties and urgencies of clinical decision-making (2).

Although the teaching of the humanities in medical schools is accepted, and it's funding assured, there remain some important obstacles to its future viability. The most serious challenge is the lack of models whom students can imitate—clinicians who

themselves can demonstrate that the humanities are useful in daily clinical medicine (4).

An effective way to involve clinical faculty in medical humanities is enhancing their knowledge and skills about this subject through faculty development programs. But it cannot be approached through formal training programs. The most successful strategy is by some form of interactive learning such as participation in small groups and problem-based learning following the formal lecture presentations (2).

In spite of remaining the debates about the definition and detailed role of the humanities in medical education, the presence of the humanities in medical education offers important possible advantages to individual doctors and to the whole of medical community. Recent trends have revealed an increasing presence of the humanities in medical training.

References

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