

## Humanities in Medicine making of a caring and mature physician

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### Abstract

Medical Humanities is being introduced in medical curriculums over the past 30 years in western world. In India, now there are few centers, which have started department of Medical humanities. It is claimed that the medical humanities in a medical school curriculum can develop attitudes related to regular work of a clinician and contribute equally to personality development. The evidence for this claim is not very strong but subjective feedback is positive. It is recommended that activities related to humanities in medicine should be introduced in every medical college with aim of improving quality and attitudes of medical graduates.

**Keywords:** Medical Humanities Curriculum, Art of Medicine

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### Introduction

In growing science of medicine, where knowledge and skills prevail, human caring attitude appears to be lagging behind. Humanities in Medicine are a multidisciplinary program designed to support students' learning about the social and cultural contexts of health, illness and medical care. Health care can never be carried out in isolation from the economic, social and political realities of contemporary society. Humanities explores health within a larger context and one gains immersive experience and education in history, language, Philosophy, Religion, Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, art and beyond. There are few who claim that Medical humanities helps our physicians to learn and imbibe professionalism, strengthens creative and artistic capabilities of an individual, gives wider perspective of health and improves caring attitude amongst young physicians.

The dictionary defines the word 'humanities' as 'learning or literature concerned with human culture, esp. literature, history, art, music, and philosophy.' The humanities should not be confused with "humanism," a specific philosophical belief, or with "humanitarianism," the concern for charitable works and social reforms. There are variable reports regarding the usefulness and the effectiveness of such curriculums all over the world.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Why Humanities in Medicine?

Due to too much emphasis on objectivity and focused evidence based approach, patient is treated as a case and not as a person as whole. "Art of medicine takes back seat losing comprehensiveness and a holistic

approach to medicine. However one must understand that Medicine is not a definite science and there is not always one right answer. Every patient is medically, social economically and culturally different and hence a one-size-fits-all treatment model are not always appropriate.<sup>3</sup> Physician must think creatively to deliver health care to all sectors of society in different settings.

Medical Humanities were introduced in various university curriculums with the intention of enhancing this aspect of "art of medicine". The medical humanities can have learning that is directly applied to the daily work of the clinician. This ability of the clinician can be directly enhanced by the study of visual arts. The study of literature can help develop another important skill of handling ambiguity and empathy. The humanities can help clinicians to develop the concept of medicine as art, general education, personal development, or new ways of thinking beyond the biomedical perspective. Humanities can develop holistic approach to clinical practice professional practice that was an integral part of the "Family Physician" concept two decades ago. A physician needs to have two aspects – scientific and artistic – that have to be combined together. Currently we are not bothering to develop the second aspect in medical education. A MH curriculum may be able to fill this gap in our curriculum.

### Implementing a Medical Humanities Curriculum

Humanity curriculum can be started as voluntary modules that include literature, paintings, fine arts, drama, and photography. It can be started as electives according to their interest. Small-group, activity based learning is used in the majority of medical schools. Another method is to show a movie followed by focused discussion and reflections from students as well as faculty. Medical Council of India developed ATCOM module in 2015, that included few modules related to humanities.

Ravi Shankar<sup>4</sup> introduced a Medical Humanities module in Nepal using small group activity- based sessions by using literature excerpts, paintings, case

scenarios, small group work and role-plays He concluded that the module having small group activities was appreciated by the participants as well as the faculty and recommended that similar sessions can be conducted in other medical schools of South Asia.

### Impact of curriculum on learning of students

The Medical Humanities curriculum is considered useful in improving a physician's communication skills. Scharzt et al<sup>5</sup> reviewed the literature on the impact of a humanities education on the performance of medical students and residents. Many of the published studies involve self-selected groups of students and seek to measure subjective outcomes, which are difficult to measure, such as increases in empathy, professionalism, and self-care. The review recommended defining the optimal role for humanities education in medical training; however further studies are needed in this regard.

In another systematic review in Academic Medicine (2010) by Ousagar and Johannessen<sup>6</sup> of 254 publications, majority (245) praised the (potential) effects of humanities on medical education or described existing courses; however the substantial evidence was weak. Only 9 articles provided evidence of attempts to document long-term impacts using diverse test tools, and the other 10 articles expressed doubtful benefit.

### The Indian Perspective

University College of Medical Sciences arranged for lectures on rationalism, Tibetan art struggle, faith healing, communication with grass roots and holistic approach.<sup>7</sup> The faculty and the students very well received them.

### Recommendations

Currently Indian MBBS curriculums are overloaded with knowledge and controlled by objective entrance examinations. The Medical Council of India introduced ATCOM module in 2015 – a curriculum for attitude and communication skills. It also proposes humanities curriculum to introduce students to a broader understanding of the socioeconomic framework and cultural context within which health is delivered through the study of humanities and social sciences. This is a welcome move by Medical Council of India. Every medical college should have a MH cell with a few designated members from faculty, students as well as external experts. In current curriculum, concept of MH should be introduced through various programs spread throughout the year. Each program should be followed by reflections from students and debriefing by experts.

In summary, humanities are being introduced in few medical colleges with the purpose of improving the caring attitudes of medical graduates and provide them wider perspectives of life. Few Indian institutes have started such curriculums with positive feedback from students and faculty. Longitudinal follow up and further

research is determine timing and structure of humanities curriculum.

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