

Persian literature course in the undergraduate medical curriculum

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A serious criticism of contemporary medicine is that it is dehumanized, meaning that it ignores the patient and his/her experiences, values, and priorities as an individual human and only seeks treatment based on the latest findings in the biomedical sciences. To modify and improve this situation, the field of “medical humanities” was formed, which seeks to include human considerations in clinical practice. One of the important domains of the field of “medical humanities” is “Literature and Medicine” [1, 2].

Literature and medicine are now taught in medical schools at all undergraduate (both in basic sciences and clinical periods) and residency levels. Broadly speaking, the reasons for this implementation are threefold. The first concerns the patient: such courses teach physicians how to listen more wisely to their patients' narratives and how to emphasize with the patient's and family members' points of view on the experience of illness and treatment. The second reason concerns the physician: Reading literature enhances personal awareness and fosters the habit of self-scrutiny. The third concerns ethics: literature and literary skills empower physicians to think both empathetically and critically about moral issues and dilemmas in daily clinical practice [3].

By reviewing the texts in the field of literature and medicine, we come across various educational programs in medical schools around the world. One of the courses in the Doctor of Medicine (MD) curriculum of Iran is Persian literature (code: 16) which three theoretical units (51 hours). This course, for which a lesson plan has not been designed in the curriculum, is usually offered to students in one of the first year. Since the Persian literature course is in the general courses section, like other courses in this section such as philosophy of ethics, Islamic ethics, and familiarity with the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is taught similarly with a single source in both medical sciences and engineering majors [4]. The book of selected Persian literary texts (third edition) has been compiled by five professors of Persian literature and published in 264 pages, and officially introduced as the textbook of this course. In this book, prose and poetry pieces by classical and sometimes contemporary writers and poets have been collected. Selected texts do not specifically address health and disease issues. In general, it seems this general course of Persian literature cannot fulfill what the medical humanities expect from literature [5].

A survey conducted by the authors using an online questionnaire in 2020 showed that most students who had taken this course believe that passing this course would not affect their future career as a doctor. However, most of them agreed that if the content changed, this course could help build necessary skills related to medicine.

Therefore, it seems that three changes, namely changing the name of the Persian literature course to literature and medicine, changing the position of the course from general courses to specific courses, and changing the lesson plan, can help make better use of this opportunity to train physicians with higher quality.

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