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The Person Behind the White Coat: Building a medical humanities core curriculum for medical students

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Context

In a healthcare environment increasingly characterized by new technology, commercialism and efficiency, which leaves patients but unheard and undocorated, medical schools are seeking to bring balance to their curricula. The introduction of a medical humanities curriculum is a necessary condition — a necessity for those in the caring professions. Medical humanities may be seen as an interdisciplinary field which draws on the social sciences, arts and humanities to inform and enhance clinical practice.

Intervention

After four years of pilot work, a Medical Humanities Planning Group was formed to design and implement a six-year compulsory medical humanities programme for medical students. Using an outcomes-based approach to student learning, specific learning objectives were identified for five themes: (1) Doctor and patient stories; (2) Culture, spirituality and healing; (3) History of medicine; (4) Death, dying and bereavement; (5) Humanitarianism and social justice, which were explored through five genres: (a) narrative, (b) performance, (c) film (visual arts), and (e) experiential learning.

Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of Year 1, students should be able to:
1. Describe the relevance of a medical humanities curriculum in the training of future doctors.
2. Discuss how engagement in the medical humanities will enable doctors to take better care of patients and themselves.
3. Reflect upon the evolving identity of doctors and medical students and the kind of practitioner you want to become.
4. Identify defining events in the history of medicine in Hong Kong and discuss their continuing impact on the health and healthcare of Hong Kong people today.

Theme

Tour & Rationale for Medical Humanities (Pathology)

Introduction

Doctor & Patient Stories

Film Studies and the Practice of Medicine (Family Medicine, Biochemistry)

Who Am I?

(Family Medicine, Clinical Oncology, Public Health, Psychiatry)

Perceptions of Doctors

(Aneuroscience, Paediatrics, Biochemistry)

Emotions in Medicine

(Drama, Music, Surgery, Anaesthesiology, Pathology, Humanities)

The Person Behind the White Coat:

Mindfulness: Being in the Moment (Centre on Behavioural Health)

Defining Events in the History of Medicine in Hong Kong: The Plague and SARS in Hong Kong (Medicine)

Mindful practice: Promoting Self-awareness and Well-being (Centre on Behavioural Health, Pathology, Community Medicine, Psychiatry, Paediatrics)

If you’re going in hell, keep going

(Psychiatry resident)

Garfield C. K. W. & Wong H. H. S.

MBS Class 2018 Student

Observe

A variety of reflective tasks, including creative artwork and performing a reimagined script, enabled students to demonstrate their understanding of “the person behind the white coat.”

Summative Assessment: Reflective Artwork on “The Person Behind the White Coat”

It is comprised of three voices— the doctor’s is ‘Bed 9’ on the left and the patient’s is ‘10p.m. post diagnosis’ on the right. Each column is read aloud before combined together as one voice, in a parody of a good doctor-patient relationship. This is double entendre on the waxing waning of vision, expecting the patient being right of his feet, and the doctor’s failure to notice him.

Reflection on Mindful Practice

Mindful practice means “being aware of my breath… it means, literally, listening to the breath, but it may also mean directly noticing concurrent phenomena such as heart rate or respiration rate.” In fact, both the physician and the patient’s thoughts are important - indispensable. In keeping with this approach, the students were not like the heartbeats, could be listened to directly, now without the aid of any instruments. (Patrick Manson: Founding Dean of the HK College of Medicine for Chinese Medicine)

Conclusion

A medical humanities curriculum has meaning if it is a compulsory part of the core curriculum and is assessed. It can be sustainable with a broad base of teaching support.

Key factors in the development of Medical Humanities curriculum

1. Support from the Dean and Curriculum Committee
2. Pedagogically sound framework: outcomes-based approach
3. Broad-based teaching support: cross-disciplinary; university & community at large
4. Quality assurance mechanism: evaluation and feedback from students, teachers and external advisors

References


2012–2013 Overall workshop evaluations

2012-2013

Workshop

1st Year Curriculum Matrix (September 2012—May 2013)

3. Medical Humanities - a 5 year conceptual framework

Year VI

- MH as part of our environment and as curriculum
- Being human and a humanist practitioners
- Introduction to medical humanities in medical education
- Exploring the person behind the white coat.

Year V – VI

- Approaches to relieve suffering and promote healing
- Applying knowledge, skills and reflection through MH

Year IV – III

- Exploring suffering & healing through MH
- Learning knowledge, skills and reflection

Year I

- Introduction to medical humanities in medical education
- Exploring the person behind the white coat.