



REVIVAL OF HUMANITY – THE ART OF HEALING

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ABSTRACT

Dentistry is a skill-based profession where emphasis is laid on refining and mastering the clinical skills. Focus should be on training our students to be competent enough to deal with the complex situations during their clinical practice. There is a need to focus on decision making, communication skills to improve clinical reasoning and interpretive skills. This is where the role of humanities sets in as humanities help in developing professional and humanistic skills. Integrating humanities in our curriculum improves student learning, develops their professional skills and better understanding of patients by creating empathy and compassion towards patients thus improving patient care. The prevailing COVID pandemic has taught us the significance of being humane, wherein doctors across the world are working selflessly to serve mankind.

KEYWORDS: Humanities, Curriculum, Skills, Dentistry, Health Science.

INTRODUCTION

Humanities is derived from Latin word humans, meaning refined culture or education befitting a cultivated man. Humanity is also indistinct discipline that studies various aspects of human society and culture. Humanity encompasses our ancient and modern languages, geography, history, religion, visual art, anthropology, literature, philosophy, psychology and musicology, law and politics.^[1]

Learning of soft skills via literature (e.g. prose and poetry), history, painting, sculpture, performing arts (theatre, cinema, music and dance) etc. is part of Medical humanities. The rationale is to use various forms of creativity and self-expression to develop qualities of compassion and empathy as a Medical professional.

Medicine, Dentistry or any profession related to health sciences can be made pliable by exposing practitioners to Medical Humanities which helps them understand a patient better accomplish their goals.^[2] Clinician's scientific expertise alone is not enough to solve a patient's problem in Medicine and Dentistry, a personal touch is a must.

The concept of Medical humanities was started in the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine by Hershey who introduced literature in Medical schools.^[3] The basis for introducing literature in Medical school was for better understanding of doctors about their patients. Experiences written by patients were read by doctors which helped them relate to their patients in a better way and make them more empathetic towards them.

The concept of Medical humanities was to offer an insight regarding illness and suffering of the patient and thus change the perception of Medical practitioners and make them more accountable. Integration of humanities/arts into medical education has helped to develop essential qualities like professionalism, self-awareness, communication skills and reflective practice among learners.

In this era of technology, the humane touch seems to be lost. There are no emotional strings attached while treating patients. Doctors most of the time work as robots with emphasis laid only on the physical cure of the patient without taking into consideration the emotional and mental wellbeing. The humane aspects of health sciences like empathy, care and compassion is lacking

among doctors today as the progress in science and technology has created a rift between patients and doctors. It is of prime importance for doctors to realize that physical pain can be alleviated by treating the ailment with modern equipment's, but comfort and solace can be provided by doctors only. It is crucial to focus on the entire well-being of the patient rather than focussing on the illness which will enable us to handle this sensitive issue effectively. Need of the hour is to provide humane care to the patients, thus enhancing the patient's ability to cope up with the illness and alleviating pain, fear and anguish. Palliative care is widely being used as it has shown to improvise patient's condition drastically.

Introducing Medical humanities in the curriculum at an undergraduate level can broaden the perspective of a student and strengthen his/her interpretive, interpersonal skill and observational skills. It can also enhance empathy and compassion and develop ethical and professional attitudes among students. To a certain extent it also helps in stress management by improving understanding of human experiences and culture. This facilitates in addressing complex issues in clinical practice.^[4]

As Health Science Professionals we need to cater to the health needs of all sectors of society in various settings. The current training does not equip the students to handle this, wherein the role of humanities sets in. Thus, teaching humanities is of utmost importance in undergraduate education. The COVID pandemic has been an eye opener made us aware about the importance of human life and the prerequisite of handling such calamities.

Humanities in Medical education

Humanities in health sciences can be studied in the form of narratives, role play, music, philosophy, sociology, movies, photography and visual art. All these develop soft skills, help in understanding empathy and practicing communication skills.

Role of Narratives in Medicine

Technology has cut off the art of healing, where doctors go beyond prescribing medication. Narrative Medicine uses tales on real life scenarios depicting the doctor patient relationship to teach humanity. This helps to better understand the patient's state of mind. Review of these experiences acts as a guide for reacting to our patients in future. They also help us comprehend the patient's anxieties, worries and behave empathetically and compassionately towards our patients. The least a patient expects from a doctor is to give a listening ear to share their agony. Thus, narratives define the key principles of humanity to the learners. Gauging narratives in our routine practice makes us more considerate with our patients. It improves clinical skills and with self-reflection makes us aware of our individual

professional responsibilities and also towards society at large.

Poetry

Poetry is a way of reviving the artist in you where your creativity plays an important role. Poetry expresses emotions and response of the patients along with the symptoms. This allows free flow of thoughts with clarity, improves imaginative power, sharper observational and analytical skills. This enhances our interpersonal skills and improves spontaneous understanding and explains the patient's behaviour. It encourages continuous reflection thus enhancing empathy and introspection and improves communication between doctors and patients. Literature study enhances empathy and skills for handling ambiguity.

Role play

Role play is a particular type of simulation, wherein a case scenario can be enacted by all the participants by playing a specific role. Enacting the situation helps you understand the patient's emotions, feelings. This creates a huge impact on the doctors, revealing the mental frame of mind and the emotional trauma of the patient and the people around. Role play emphasises upon doctors/students to completely blend in the characters which simplifies to comprehend the emotions, feelings, mental frame of the patient and the social stigma attached to it especially in cases of HIV AIDS and other communicable diseases. COVID 19 can also be included here due to the social stigma attached to it. The impact it can have on the patient, the near and dear ones and the society can be experienced. This training tool helps acquire knowledge of the patient's state of mind, develop skills to help patient overcome this problem and develop the right attitude while handling this issue.

Philosophy

Philosophy is critical evaluation of assumptions and arguments. There is always a room for critical thinking in health sciences. Philosophy teaches us to organize our thoughts to reach a logical conclusion. These are essential in diagnosis, as doctors gather information and go through logical steps to arrive at a conclusion. Philosophy in medical education thus broadens our perspectives and improves our ability to make a sound judgement, developing tolerance and empathy. It enables better clinical judgement and critical thinking.

Sociology

Social influences play a major role in a patient's life. The doctor should have knowledge of these various social factors like beliefs and practices, food habits, myths which have a psychological effect on the patients. It makes our job easy by taking into consideration all these factors during treatment.

Photography and Visual Art

Art, literature are expressions of human creativity and give doctors clarity about their purpose or goal and

improves understanding. Photography gives us visual clues to understand facial expressions. These along with body language give important clues to diagnosis and better understanding of their emotions. This enhances students/doctors observational and communication skills and empathy. Viewing paintings activates multiple regions in the brain. By visualizing images, we tend to experience subjective reactions like underlying emotions along with object recognition. Visual images such as artwork improve thinking and communication skills increases empathy, awareness and sensitivity. Study of visual arts helps to improve the ability of the clinician to recognise clinical signs of disease in the patient.

Movies

Have a great influence on the emotions, thinking and attitudes of human beings. Cine education is the best medium of education to depict clinical situations which promote critical thinking. This can broaden the perspective of our students and assists them to comprehend the different responses generated by different people in the same situation.^[5]

CONCLUSION

Today the entire world is facing the brunt of COVID pandemic. The health care professionals have dedicated themselves to combat this infection. This has posed a lot of challenges which can be taken as opportunities for our self-reflection and better ways of treating our patients. Introduction of Medical Humanities in curricula will help our students become better doctors and treat their patients more effectively. This helps us understand what it means to be sick from the patient's point of view. The nature of illness may vary and the patients are devastated due their emotional trauma, social stigma, financial burden, depression, fear, anguish. A human touch is required at this stage. Treating patients taking into consideration their state of mind is of prime importance. Palliative care is also one branch that is gaining importance in this aspect which focuses on improving the quality of life of patients with life threatening diseases and also their families in despair. The physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspect improves with palliative care. This is where Medical humanities play a key role. Our teaching contributes significantly to the development of doctoring skills but fails to instil human values. It is a well-known fact that our students learn from what they observe and consider teachers are their role models. We can set the best example for our students by practicing humanity and serving our patients with humility and gratitude. There is a need to conduct workshops to create an awareness about humanities among health care professionals and students which can bring about changes in the health care system. To conclude Medical humanities helps us understand what it is to be "fully human".

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