Letter to editor:

Twelve tips on the importance of medical humanities in medical schools

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Abstract

Medical humanities are a set of interdisciplinary fields that embrace social and human sciences. The future doctors are expected to benefit from medical humanities in providing health care that address patients as whole human beings and as 'cases'. Medical humanities can be expected to be beneficial for other health fields programs such as nursing and public health.

الملخص

الانسانيات الطبية هي مجموعة علوم في حقول معرفية متداخلة تشمل العلوم الاجتماعية والعلوم الانسانية والفنون بأنواعها المختلفة. يتوقع ان يستفيد اطباء المستقبل من الانسانيات الطبية في بذل رعاية طبية تخاطب المريض كانسان متكامل وليس كحالة مرضية. الانسانيات الطبية يمكن ان تفيد كل الدارسين للعلوم الصحية مثل التمريض والصحة العامة.

Tip 1

What are the medical humanities?

Medical humanities are divided into three categories, pure humanities (e.g. philosophy, psychology, history), social sciences (e.g. sociology, cultural studies) and arts.

Tip 2

What is the scope of medical humanities?

Medical humanities are a set of interdisciplinary fields, applied to achieve some of the goals of medical education and practice. They aim at understanding health, illness, sufferings, disabilities, recovery and health care issues from a non- biomedical sciences approach, using 'tools' like culture, feelings, expression, and experience of patients to appreciate their needs and humanity. [1]

Tip 3

Why are humanities important in medical practice?

The future doctor is expected to integrate humanities in the process of health care of his patients [1]. It will be a 'shift 'from the traditional biomedical sciences approaches which used history, physical examination and investigations to solve the pathophysiological problems of patients. In sum, the major theme of medical humanities is 'caring medicine' in contrast to the 'curative medicine' theme of biomedical sciences.

Tip 4

Who should teach humanities?

Interested physicians of different specialties, offered relevant training (not necessarily postgraduate degrees, thought better if obtained), and interested non-physician academicians of human and social sciences can both teach the humanities. The non-medical staff may benefit from a programme of professional development to get initiation to the clinical milieu of medical study.

Tip 5

When humanities are taught (in which part of the teaching curriculum?)

For the schools that want to introduce humanities in their curricula, they better start with a debate among staff on their rationale and relevance to accept integration of humanities in schools' programmes. The debate may focus on how humanities can benefit medical study, how and when appear in curricula.

Tip 6

Teaching of humanities: getting use of innovate teaching methods

Where there is a resistance to include the humanities, a start with elective (voluntary) courses can be initiated. Another option is to `insert` humanity topics in courses of the community medicine or family medicine or incorporated as learning objectives in the problem-based learning.

Tip 7

What better teaching methods to be adopted to teach humanities?

The medical schools can use both traditional and innovative teaching methods in medical humanities courses, e.g. small group teaching, problem-based learning, seminars, film and theatre shows, art exhibitions, essay assignment, and guest lectures

Tip 8

Examples of teaching methods for humanities

Philosophy: is better taught as integrated concepts in the relevant items in the cur-

riculum, rather than lectures on classical philosophical questions such as metaphysics or epistemology.

Biomedical ethics: biomedical ethics can be taught by using ethical issues and dilemmas in clinical presentations, literature and drama as teaching points.

Tip 9

Assessment of humanities courses

The assessment of medical humanities courses may need methods such as essays on selected topics, analytic exercises, critics of drama works. These methods seem better than the multiple or single choice tests, as humanities issues require in-depth opinions rather than yes/no answers.

Tip 10

Barriers to teaching humanities

There is a lack of qualified and interested teachers in humanities. Some students see humanities as irrelevant, and not useful for their future career and may take them away from the 'real' medicine that requires only clinical competence (as they believe). Even more, some of the teachers with old-fashioned minds bear negative views toward the humanities.

Tip 11

Overcoming barrier to teach medical humanities

Teachers should be initiated to the relevance of medial humanities to the medical practice. The same applies to the students so that they should not consider humanities teaching as irrelevant or time wasting.

Tip 12

The place of medical humanities in vhealth-allied colleges

Humanities can be beneficial in other health programmes. For example, the nursing students who intimately deal in the future with patients from different ethnic, socio-cultural and religious groups may need to be culturally sensitive to these aspects.

References

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