

INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL HUMANITIES

I. Introduction

My background – I am a psychologist by training, and have spent more than 30 years in the UCI Department of Family Medicine, teaching about the doctor-patient relationship. For the past 12 years have directed the program in medical humanities at UCI

II. Objectives

- A. Understand how literature can be used as a tool for professional development**
- A. Describe how studying literature can increase physician empathy for patients' (and physicians') experience**
- B. Demonstrate how literature can help us think differently and more creatively about patients**
- C. Understand how exposure to literature can reduce physician frustration and burn-out by restoring a sense of mystery and awe**

III. What Exactly Are Medical Humanities?

- A. A field of scholarship and academic study**
- B. The incorporation of humanities-and arts-based teaching into medical school and residency curricula:
 - 1. Literature**
 - 2. Narrative ethics**
 - 3. Visual and performing arts**
 - 4. History of medicine**
 - 5. Philosophy of medicine****

IV. Why Turn to the Humanities?

- A. T.S. Eliot questions – what has been lost in medicine?**
- B. Truer than the truth (Old Folk Proverb)
 - 1. What does this mean?**
 - 2. A good story or poem can give us insights and truths that mere facts can't provide**
 - 3. Reminds us to listen to the authentic voice and experience of the patient**
 - 4. Helps us see familiar experiences in new and creative ways**
 - 5. Counteracts cynicism and despair by reconnecting us with our fundamental values and a sense of awe and wonder****

V. Patients Can Authentically Disclose What Their Illness Experiences Are Like

- A. Chemotherapy
 - 1. What is the experience of this patient?**
 - 2. Stages of grief****

VI. Enlarging our Perspective

- A. Medicine is very good about teaching what the point is and how to stick to it**
- B. Can learn a lot by not sticking to the point**
- C. "Walking the Dog"**

1. In this poem, the doctor looks at an old problem – overweight patient with diabetes - in a new way, and learns something in the process
2. The doctor prescribes a pet, which helps all of us think outside the box in terms of innovative therapies
3. But the treatment doesn't work!, at least not in the way he thought it would, so the narrator (and we, the readers) have to grapple with the fact that patients don't always do what doctors tell them to do
4. Yet in one final twist that shows us truth truer than the truth, in this apparently futile act, the poem conveys the value of the doctor's caring and concern for this patient.
5. Wright's poem helps us understand something about diabetes and about the intricacies of the doctor-patient relationship that we might not have understood through textbook knowledge alone

VII. Paying Attention to Values (Einstein quote)

- A. Good doctors need to figure out every day “what should be” –
 1. In the lives of their patients, in their illnesses, in their suffering, and in their deaths –
 2. And in their own lives as well
- B. Literature can help us explore our values not just theoretically, but in very concrete, emotionally engaging ways
- C. In “I Stepped Past Your Room” this family physician examines a moral lapse
 1. He avoids entering the room of his dying patient
 2. Yet by reflecting on his avoidance, by reflecting on the person of the patient with whom he has taken this terrible journey, he is able to move past his own fears and, as so often happens, find solace in the courage of his patient
 3. The physician is able not only to avoid abandoning his patient, but to avoid abandoning himself
 4. In doing so, he is able to reconnect with his deeply held values, his truest truths, about what it means to be a physician

VIII. Mystery and Awe (Remen quote)

- A. Medicine is larger than science
- B. Life is larger than science
- C. Leave room in the practice of medicine for awe and mystery
- D. Twisted lips story

IX. What Skills Can the Humanities Help Doctors Develop?

- A. Pay close attention to the richness, particularity, and nuances of patients (the cancer patient waiting at the light; the woman with diabetes cuddling her dog)
- B. Maintain empathy for multiple points of view in patient care (listening to the voice of the woman with breast cancer; seeing the fears of the young woman in Selzer's story, and the courage of her husband)
- C. Not to be afraid to risk emotional connection and engagement with patients (which the physicians in these poems do)

- D. Place patients within the context of their lived experience, rather than solely within the context of clinic or hospital (we see into the life of Grunberger's narrator; into the life of the woman with diabetes; the life almost gone of Greenstone's pt; and glimpse the relationship between the young husband and wife that exists outside of medicine)**
- E. Develop sensitivity to the meaning embedded in the patient's experience (Wright had to understand his patient was happiest cuddling rather than walking the dog; we have to understand the losses in Chemotherapy, and in Twisted Smile)**
- F. Acknowledge the important role that creativity and imagination play in the art of doctoring (Wright prescribing a dog; Greenstone having the courage to envision his patient's life; Selzer imagining the young husband as a god)**
- G. Develop self-awareness of one's own psychological processes (Wright's self-congratulatory attitude toward his innovative therapy; Greenstone's confronting his fear and sense of impotence)**
- H. To remember that patients suffer and, like Dr. Greenstone, it is the obligation of the physician to be willing to share some small measure of that suffering with them**
- I. To leave some space, as Dr. Selzer reminds us, for awe and mystery**