

This workshop invites participants to reconsider an ancient virtue, humility, to help remedy frailties of our current healthcare system. The modernist, positivist, and reductionist orientation of the present system, while achieving much good, has also created fragmented care in a highly technological atmosphere which is unaffordable or unavailable to significant portions of patient populations. Those fortunate enough to receive care, as well as their doctors, must deal with an explosive growth in medical knowledge. This abundance of informational possibilities, as well as human and technical errors in applying complicated invasive diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, increasingly limit and erode the clinician-patient relationship. We contend that listening to the voice of humility in medicine will help us redefine and humanize our practice and training goals.

We define humility as the ability to know one's own strengths and weaknesses with ease and acceptance, and to be open to strengths and weaknesses in others. Our interdisciplinary presenters, representing three medical specialties, ethics, literature, and psychology, will explore the philosophical and cultural roots of humility, the place of humility within the clinician-provider relationship as well as within medical systems, and demonstrate how the humanities can effectively bring this important voice into medical education.

The workshop commences experientially with a readers' theater presentation of a Hemingway short story that vividly illuminates moments of humility and arrogance in patient care. This presentation demonstrates a pedagogical technique that can help students explore their capabilities and vulnerabilities in a way that moves them towards clarity and self-acceptance of personal strengths and weaknesses.

Drawing on issues raised in this exercise, we next reference various philosophical traditions to explore how culture influences its members (be it doctors, patients, policy-makers, insurers, or politicians) toward humility or arrogance. From the root "humus," suggesting earth, nature, and mortality, this segment of the workshop examines lessons derived from native cultures to better understand how patient and physician narratives can illustrate and encourage humility.

We then investigate ways in which contemporary medical culture rewards self-assertiveness and implicitly condones traits contrary to humility such as arrogance, entitlement, and narrow-mindedness. We will also demonstrate how reflective practices as well as literary, historical, and real-life role models, encourage the reintroduction of humility into clinical practice and learning environments.

The final presentation focuses on the role humility plays in clinical care through the voice of virtue ethics. Building upon ethical theories of uncertainty, we will illuminate how humility brings balance to individual doctor-patient relationships as well as to the medical teams required for successful delivery of healthcare in the 21st century.

The workshop concludes by engaging presenters and participants in a lively discussion of how medical educators can learn to recognize, legitimate and utilize the voice of humility in training future physicians, emphasizing the role of the humanities. We will consider questions such as: What does the voice of humility sound like? What happens to those who speak it in a culture rooted in certainty, authority and control? Most importantly, how will educators invite humility into post-modern medicine?

Word count = 499

Objectives:

As a result of this presentation, attendees will...

- 1) Be able to define humility, and recognize the special voice humility brings to the medical field, with an emphasis on lessons learned from traditional philosophy and native cultures.
- 2) Experience and learn methods derived from the humanities which actively bring humility into the clinical and educational realms.
- 3) Engage in an active discussion of the ways humility can be integrated into curricula in our home educational institutions.