

Gold Humanism Honor Society – Art of Doctoring

INTRO SLIDE. I'm delighted and honored to have the opportunity to present our course, Art of Doctoring, to such a distinguished group of colleagues.

AoD, as students have affectionately dubbed it, began 4 years ago when a small group of faculty realized that we were constantly haranguing our students, with the best of intentions, to be more compassionate, more humane, more altruistic. But we gave them almost no guidance in how to do so. We felt it was our obligation to walk the walk with our students better than we had been doing heretofore, and thus the course was born.

Since its inception, it has consistently enrolled between 25 and 30% of the graduating 4th year class.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES. The goals of the course are simple: 1) to demonstrate to students experientially the value of reflection and imaginative perspective and 2) to help students develop specific humanistic attitudes and behaviors through practice. We believe strongly that, while individuals may be endowed with different propensities toward humanism, all people, given the right circumstances and encouragement, can enhance their humanistic repertoire and become more humane and caring individuals. Like any other skill in medicine, humanistic attitudes and behaviors require practice and repetition, as well as feedback and support.

METHODS. We use a combination of mini-lectures (no more than 10 minutes); small and large group discussion; role-plays; written reflective and creative assignments; readings; and a personal change project to try to accomplish these goals.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS. Writing assignments give students a chance to reflect on and explore difficult, frustrating, and inspiring aspects of medicine with the goal of gaining specific insights and resolutions that they can carry forward into their professional and personal lives.

TOPICS. We start with appreciative inquiry, stories of inspiration that have confirmed students' choice of profession. We move through self and other knowledge, using the Meyer-Briggs personality inventory; working with difficult emotions; learning how to keep centered, emotionally balanced; self-care to avoid compassion fatigue and burn-out; addressing loss, grief, and how to find healing; how to diminish and respond to medical mistakes; 3 sessions problem-solving difficult physician/other encounters; Rachel Naomi Remen's Healer's Art; and a final session that returns to the appreciative inquiry exercise.

PERSONAL PROJECTS. Personal projects may be either N of 1 design, in which the student identifies a desired goal (increased patience); establishes a baseline; comes up with an intervention (deep breaths, focus on patient); evaluates post-intervention. Or a creative project (poem, artwork, skit, essay) that reflects back over the past four years, considers how they have changed and transformed; and what they hope to carry into their

future. All projects are presented to the large group; and all receive detailed written feedback from faculty.

EXAMPLE OF PERSONAL PROJECT AND FACULTY RESPONSE.

EVALUATION DATA. The course is highly evaluated. (Readings, by the way, are on a scale of too little, about right, too much, so 3 is the ideal score). Interestingly, the content of the course is less highly evaluated than either the faculty or the overall course, suggesting the importance of role modeling in medical training.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE STUDENT COMMENTS. In general, the students are quite appreciative of this course. It seems to be an important way of pausing to look backward; acknowledging achievements and mistakes; and focusing on the doctors they want to be. It is also a way of expressing appreciation for and saying goodbye to classmates. Criticisms of the course consistently note the large size; and an overemphasis on negative issues, which we have tried to correct this year.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS. We have realized that addressing deficits and unskillful attitudes and behavior is not necessarily the same as cultivating positive attitudes, behaviors, and emotions, so we've added more positive activities such as appreciative inquiry, cultivating positive emotions, introducing each session with an expression of gratitude, and encouraging students to bring in wisdom sayings that provide them personal guidance. We are also attempting new strategies to make the course more interactive and involve more retiring students.

SUMMARY. This course is really a blessing to teach. Inevitably, we have the privilege of seeing students wrestle with difficult interactions between self and profession, grow in self-awareness and insight, dig deep to challenge their comfortable and/or automatic ways of doing things, and often transform into more mature, more open, and more authentic individuals.