

Exploring Medical Humanities

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Medical humanities are defined as an interdisciplinary field/domain/approach that involves creative and intellectual strengths of diverse disciplines, including literature, art, creative writing, drama, film, music, philosophy, ethical decision making, anthropology, and history, in pursuit of medical educational goals. The idea is that arts can provide additional perspective to the sciences [1].

Critical medical humanities is an approach which shows that the arts and humanities have more to offer to healthcare than simply improving medical education. It proposes that the arts and humanities offer different ways of thinking about human history, culture, behavior which can be used to dissect, critique and influence healthcare practices and priorities [1,3].

The medical humanities serve three main goals:

- 1) The study of the human aspects of medicine from within traditional arts disciplines of history, philosophy, sociology and literature.
- 2) The intersection of medicine and the creative arts
- 3) The training of more insightful and compassionate doctors [2].

The medical humanities are concerned with “the science of the human”, and bringing the perspectives of disciplines such as history, philosophy, literature, art and music to have better understanding on the dimensions of health, illness and medicine. Medical

humanities are designed to overcome the separation of clinical care from the “human sciences” and to foster interdisciplinary teaching and research to optimize patient care. Medical humanities have become part of the mainstream medical education in North America and the United Kingdom, and are now integrated into many medical curricula in Australia [2].

In developing countries, we need to develop this field, for undergraduate and postgraduate curricula.

Medical humanities help develop soft skills. Without soft skills and empathy doctors cannot play their role as ‘messiah(saviour)’.

Medical humanities are the element that represents emotional intelligence.

From ethical and evidence-based decision making to breaking news, to patients these skills are needed. Innovation and problem-solving skills can be enhanced by incorporating medical humanities in undergraduate and post graduate curriculum.

I started my journey of medical humanities 14 years back when I wrote a poem on ‘empathy’, way before starting medical school. Since then, I’ve written many poems and articles in international and national journals/magazines/newspapers focusing on faculties of narrative medicine, learning, teaching, mental health, health and humanities.

Before entering medical school my interest in art and humanities was profound. However, during undergraduate years, I found that

the curriculum was deficient in this area and I felt distanced from it. But after graduation during formative years of clinical practice I felt a void between hard core science and humanities. Whenever my patients broke into tears and melt downs after learning about their diagnosis and prognoses, I'd have to summon my self-learned soft skills and empathy [4].

That's when I realized that there was a dire need of bridging gaps between medicine and humanities and my journey of medical humanities started from realization of this fact.

As a medical humanity advocate and writer, I'd bring attention of my medical fraternity towards incorporation of it at the level of both undergraduate and post graduate programs, for better training and development of soft skills such as compassion, empathy and problem solving amongst doctors.

An archetypical clinician represents compassion, empathy, understanding and ethical decision making and this can be achieved through medical humanities.

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About the author: Dr.Imbesat is a resident of Pediatric Surgery track, medical humanities writer /advocate, writer, poet and artist. She is demystifying hard core medicine through her writings and work.