

Arts and clinical methodology

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BACKGROUND

In all Italian medical degree curricula (CLM) there is a sequence of courses, variously named but most frequently referred to as 'Methodology'. They often extend from the 1st to the 6th year and are mainly oriented towards the acquisition of a 'methodological' competence, i.e. focused on 'how' one performs the acts of thought and technical-manual gestures proper to the medical profession. Methodology courses are also aimed at supporting students' critical reflection on their emerging professional identity. Typical disciplines in these courses are psychology, anthropology, ethics, bioethics and deontology, communication, history taking, physical examination, principles of clinical reasoning and Evidence Based Medicine (EBM), clinical epidemiology, and the characteristics of the different care contexts of individuals, social groups, and populations. In this context, the use of methods typical of the Medical Humanities is frequent (Strepparava et al., 2019).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

At the third year of the CLM 'C' of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at Sapienza University of Rome, the Clinical Methodology course runs throughout the third year. The course has a flipped class structure (Consorti & Mingarelli, 2018) and is based on an epistemological premise summarised in the three verbs 'I observe-describe-interpret'. The course integrates traditional medical semeiotics, in which history taking and physical examination skills are learned peer-to-peer (Consorti et al, 2013), with content from clinical epidemiology, history of medicine, Evidence Based Medicine and clinical pathophysiology. In class, role plays, and individual and small

group exercises are performed to interpret clinical and professional situations. The course also includes attendance at clinical settings, followed by reflective writings on the lived experience.

In this context, the previous usual presence of Humanities-based activities was enriched from 2018 with the addition of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) activities, integrated as ordinary course components.

RESULTS

A longitudinal study demonstrated the efficacy of VTS in developing and maintaining the skill of observing and analytically describing artistic and medical images. (Ferrara et al, 2020a). The skill was evaluated with the Italian VTS Skill, a validated rubric composed by four axes: critical thinking, observation and attention skill, use of language and problem solving (Ferrara et al, 2020b). More recently, we started using graphic novels as a tool for vicarious learning of difficult relational situations, like refusal of care and end-of-life decisions (Consorti et al, 2023), in the frame of the EU funded project ELPIS¹.

DISCUSSION

Exposing medical students to the arts as a component of the broader domain of the Medical Humanities has several positive effects, such as disrupting acquired beliefs and assumptions, introducing a pause in perception, thought, and action, and encouraging them to engage with complexity and ambiguity (Kumagai, 2017). Overall, the inclusion of artistic artefacts of all kinds (visual, musical, cinematic, literature, ...) allows for a comprehensive representation of human beings in their multiple dimensions, according to a personalistic point of view.

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CONCLUSION

Although the inclusion of the arts and medical humanities in medical curricula is supported by several international recommendations, there is still a long way to go before this topic is fully considered in educational design. This article brings further experience to this discourse, highlighting the need for full integration of students' personal and professional development.

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