



Book review: Humanities in medical education

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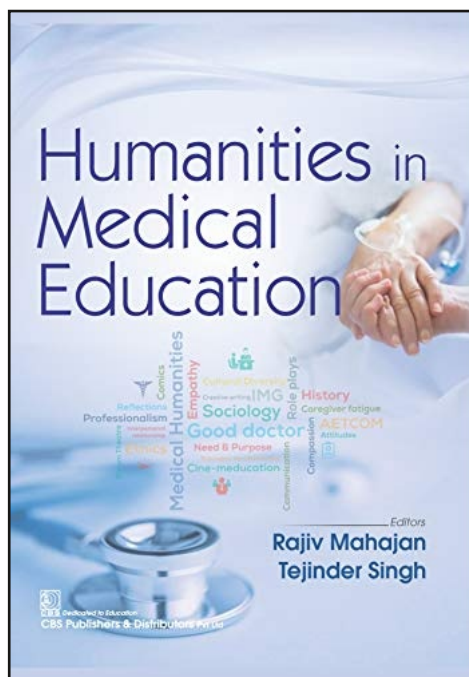
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The book, “Humanities in Medical Education”, couldn’t have come at a better time. It is edited by Dr. Rajiv Mahajan and Dr. Tejinder Singh, both of whom are well known in the field of medical education and have vast experience in publishing on varied topics related to it.

A multi-authored book, it touches on a wide range of humanities topics, thus giving a comprehensive account of the humanities

as they relate to medical education. This very handy paperback also has a kindle edition, and is published by CBS Publishers and Distributors, who have brought out quite a few books that complement the current publication.

The foreword by an eminent medical educationist of the calibre of Dr. Ved Prakash Mishra along with the curtain raiser

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by internationally well-known educationist, Prof. Stewart Mennin, sets the tone of the book.

The all-inclusive definition of medical humanities given by the authors as “an amalgamation of medical sciences with arts viz, philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, literature, theatre and art empathy, culture and more importantly with ethics, communication and professionalism in medical context, with interdisciplinary interaction and application of clinical skills with soft skills for improving patient care outcomes” sums up all the topics covered in this book.

This wide-ranging book on the Humanities has 17 chapters placed under four sections. The first section deals with an introduction to the Medical humanities, and deals with the history of and concepts in this field. It traces the history of humanities in the western world as well as in India and Asia. The author has brought out the close association between bioethics and humanities. The second chapter in this section refers to the need for teaching and learning of humanities, and the third chapter talks of what it takes to be a good doctor, basically establishing a need for including humanities in the competency-based medical education (CBME) curriculum that was introduced by the Medical Council of India (MCI) in 2018. The concept of probity as an essential characteristic of patient care is very well explained.

The next section addresses the focus areas that are the foundation of Medical humanities, namely communication and interpersonal skills, professionalism, attitudes, empathy and altruism, and medical sociology. These four chapters are informative, and the topics are dealt with in depth. I liked the detailed account of how communication can be taught and assessed in a longitudinal manner from phase 1 to phase 3 of the curriculum. Similarly, the parts about how, when and where professionalism could be taught, what could be assessed and what tools can be used for assessment are so well illustrated in tabular form (pages 42-43). The chapter on Medical

Sociology, too makes a scholarly contribution to this section. The chapter on Attitudes, Empathy and Altruism explains these important traits well. It would have been good if the teaching learning strategies and assessment of these attributes had also been discussed under separate headings. Over all these focussed areas are very well written.

The third section deals with teaching-learning methodologies. This is an informative section, and it highlights how the humanities need not employ traditional pedagogical methods such as lectures, seminars etc., a fact that has been stressed by many of the authors. The longest section of the book, it also is the most interesting and enlightening one as many of the methods discussed are rarely used as instructional methods in medical education currently in India.

The chapter on the role of cinemeducation in teaching medicine using “trigger” movie clips, video clips or full length movies, and television series, is an interesting concept that has been explained in detail with the help of both Hindi and English movies along with the messages they potentially convey. The main goal of cinematic approaches is to promote reflection, provide a forum for discussion, bring up issues related cultural diversities, explore the doctor-patient relationship, and learn teamwork (page 67). Cinema is useful in teaching since it is familiar, evocative and non-threatening for students (page 66). The section on challenges for utilizing cinema as a competent teaching tool is addressed well, with suggestions given on how to overcome them.

The chapter on role plays as teaching tools elucidates their usefulness in learning interviewing skills, and there is a detailed description of the planning and execution of role plays (pages 74-75). The chapter could have been made crisper by avoiding repetition of ideas.

The chapter on Theatre and Forum Theatre is well written, easy to read and concise. The place of theatre in developing learner

competencies in different domains such as clinician, team leader and team member, communicator, and lifelong learner is well delineated (pages 83-84). The experiential learning that can happen with Theatre of the Oppressed would be useful to address areas where students and faculty struggle and which impacts their well being and erodes their performance on the ground (page 84).

The next chapter on case studies describes the use of real or hypothetical cases for bridging the gap between theory and practice. Among the tools for case-based learning using the humanities, it is well explained how narrative, literature, anthropology, graphic medicine, films, and Theatre of the Oppressed can be used in this context. I would have liked to read a little more in depth about the use of anthropology, as the remaining tools have been described in other chapters as well.

The chapter on creative writing, from scalpel to pen, describes how creative writing can have a positive influence on patient care. The tools that are designated for effective creative writing vary from reflective diaries, narratives, poetry, essays, and story telling to autobiographies and medical memoirs. As rightly put by the author, narrative writing helps one to stand back from oneself and question one's behaviours and attitudes and also helps to view patient problems from varied perspectives.

The chapter on Artwork, Comics and cartoons gives detailed information on how to create comic strips, and about the resources available both in print and digitally. It was a little disappointing not to see anything on the use of artwork, such as paintings, in the book.

An important teaching learning tool that is rarely used in medical education is the art of reflection. The chapter on Reflections will help both the medical faculty and their students - the former, for reflecting on their teaching, and the latter, for self-directed learning. The commonly used models for reflection are well documented with suitable

examples. I feel that the examples of narratives and reflective writing using Ralfe model (page 118-120) will be useful for faculty, students and practitioners who wish to start writing reflections.

The fourth and the final section addresses not only the important but also the challenging topics of implantation and assessment. The chapter on the connection between the humanities and the CBME curriculum tries to establish a strong relation between the two and succeeds well. The force field analysis framework followed by creating a stakeholder matrix suggested for implementation of the medical humanities curriculum will be helpful for implementing it in individual institutions. Right from the first chapter, each author has shown a clear association between the MCI's five attributes of an Indian Medical Graduate, the CBME curriculum (especially the Attitude, Ethics and Communication (AETCOM) module), and the medical humanities. The chapter on a structured curriculum in the Indian context identifies the generic competencies and sub-competencies as related to the medical humanities and shows how they correlate with the AETCOM competencies. Authors have given relevant tips for developing an institutional curriculum for the medical humanities.

The final chapter touches upon essential concepts and tools for assessment. As mentioned in the issues with assessment section, the medical humanities are a complex construct, and the tools currently available for assessment are specific tools to assess specific components of the humanities; these, thus, can provide only an indirect assessment of the learning from the medical humanities curriculum. As professed by the author, teaching-learning and robust assessment is still a journey underway as far as the humanities in medical education is concerned.

I am sure this well written, comprehensive book on the "Humanities in Medical Education" will be a great resource for planning and implementing medical humanities curricula in medical colleges in

the country. Each chapter has nice illustrations, simple tables, and is well referenced. In addition, the book also contains references for additional reading. There is a little bit of overlap in some of the chapters (such as case studies) and this could have been avoided.

I would like to congratulate the editors for

the commendable job they have done in bringing out this comprehensive book on "Humanities in Medical education". It is my belief that this book will be a guiding force for integrating the humanities into the CBME curriculum, and in producing an Indian Medical Graduate with the right attitudes and values who will be locally relevant and globally viable.
