



CAME Voice/Voix

Medical Humanities: On the Need of Self-Expression in Medical School

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On the first day of medical school, I was told that I would become a lifelong learner. I was surprised, later, to see how most medical students are taught to go through their medical curriculum without questioning it, or reflect upon their learning, given that learning is a permanent process of their profession. It was not until I experienced some challenges in my own training that I got involved in medical humanities.

Medical students are expected to write about themselves in ways that promote their qualities e.g. medical school or residency applications, but they are rarely given the opportunity to reflect honestly on their experiences given the competitive nature of these processes. After all, ‘who would want ‘weak’ candidates who display publicly their emotions?’ Fortunately, the medical education community has become more and more accepting of students’ self-expression. It is notable that this evolution has paralleled the growing opportunity students have to freely express themselves through blogs and social media, like Tumblr and Twitter, sometimes used as safety valves for students.

It was not until I attended the Creating Space Symposium last April, organized by the Arts, Humanities and Social Science in Medicine (AHSSM) Education Interest Group (EIG) of the Canadian Association for Medical Education (CAME), that I realized the degree of influence that medical students’ initiatives in medical humanities has on their peers. The act of reflection is very lonely by itself, but meeting like-minded colleagues from all over North America was affirming.

The presented projects, (such as online magazines, art exhibitions, and poetry anthologies), were all supported by the students’ respective schools of medicine. The similarity of students’ experience, despite the geographic distance, shows that medical school is a universal experience and, through medical humanities, and it was clear that my joys and worries were shared by my colleagues from across North America. This has stimulated a greater involvement in medical education, which has in turn fuelled my motivation by reminding me of the pressing need for student self-expression.

“Creating Space VI: Health Humanities: Social Accountability in Action” will run in Montreal, 15-16 April, 2016. See <http://centreformedicalhumanities.org/creating-space-vi-health-humanities-social-accountability-in-action-cfp-montreal-15-16-april-2016>