The Importance of Integrating the Arts and Humanities Into Medical Education

The arts and humanities contribute immensely and immeasurably to medical education. As different ways of knowing, sharing, and meaning-making, the arts and humanities strengthen our understanding, inspire compassion and creativity, and stimulate our cognitive capacities.

The arts represent complex ideas, often conveyed with simplicity and aesthetic frisson, and generate interpretations and analyses that may stretch far beyond the original intentions of the artists. The humanities allow us to connect across time and cultures, to recognize patterns of consequence, and to self-observe and reflect. Enriching our experience, the arts and humanities connect us with the lives and perspectives of others, proffering fundamental insights into illness and suffering, health and healing. For these and other reasons, integration of the arts and humanities into medical education is worthy of our attention and commitment.

This issue of the journal highlights many diverse examples of the integration of arts and humanities into medical education. I hope that our readers will value their encounters with the scholarly, visual, narrative, poetic, and even unexpected musical elements that have come together for the collection.

Included are insights and stories from trainees across the health professions, a scoping review of published reports of arts and humanities curricula, a study on self-reflective writing by medical students, and an essay on how visual arts training can enhance clinical skills. An AM Last Page provides a model for arts and humanities integration into medical education. Taken together, these works illustrate broad experiences across academic medicine as well as illuminate a path of shared knowledge and community in the health professions.

To elevate the contribution of the arts and humanities to medical education, we appointed a new assistant editor for Medicine and the Arts and adopted a new approach to selecting art for the cover of our print issues of Academic Medicine through an annual international competition. Please listen to the episode of the Academic Medicine podcast entitled “The Arts and Humanities in Medicine” and see the journal’s instructions for authors for additional details.

The integration of the arts and humanities, along with biomedical and scientific disciplines, into medical education is a deliberate decision. This decision honors creativity, compassion, critique, and connection. Importantly, this decision is informed by a view that all human knowledge is interconnected, generative, at times irreducible, and always incomplete, a lesson of significance for academic medicine.

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Editor’s Note: The opinions expressed in this editorial do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the AAMC or its members.

References


doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000004170