

Exploring arts, humanities now mandatory for UB medical students



Medical students sketch a model in the "Life Drawing" workshop led by Ginny O'Brien, curator of education at the UB Anderson Gallery. Photo: Douglas Levere

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"The practice of medicine is a complicated experience that draws on cultural, political, psychological and social strands."

Linda Pessar, director
Center for Medical Humanities

Since Hippocrates, medical practice has been seen as both science and art. And in the 21st century — amid ever-greater scientific advances — medical schools are working to maintain balance between the two, developing new ways to highlight the art of medicine.

At UB, the effort to develop a more balanced medical education experience has inspired First Year Humanities Day, a new requirement for first-year medical students.

At the first Humanities Day, a half-day event on Dec. 5 sponsored by the medical school's Center for Medical Humanities, students attended a broad range of workshops and lectures that used the arts, humanities, ethics and social sciences to teach the art of medicine and techniques of observation, analysis and self-reflection.

"UB, along with other medical schools nationwide, understands that just as we require our students to develop scientific expertise, they also need to develop expertise in the art of practicing medicine," says Michael Cain, vice president for health sciences and dean of the medical school.

"Our students must learn to appreciate and understand not just clinical symptoms, but the individual who is experiencing them," Cain says. "The medical school's new humanities requirement is one way to achieve this goal."

During Humanities Day, students heard about and discussed medicine as depicted in poetry, music and drawing; they were even able to participate as artists themselves, drawing a nude model in one session as they learned to correlate findings from gross anatomy in a living body.

Other topics covered during the day included discussing health care in terms of cost, cultural attitudes and ethics.

Additional lecture/workshop titles and speakers included:

- "Mindfulness practices for personal and professional use," Susan Nierenberg, clinical assistant professor, School of Nursing.
- "Music and medicine: What we can learn about medicine through the lens of pop culture," Sergio Hernandez, associate professor of psychiatry, and Zack Puca, UB medical student
- "Poetry and medicine," Harvey A. Berman, associate professor, Department of Pharmacology & Toxicology.
- "Poverty and health," John Fudyma, professor of medicine.
- "The captain of all these men of death: A social and cultural history of tuberculosis," David Hertzberg, associate professor of history.
- "What more can I say? The numerous roles of doctors in society," Peter Martin, psychiatrist.



A student shades her drawing in the "Life Drawing" workshop. Photo: Douglas Levere

Linda Pessar, professor emeritus of psychiatry and director of the Center for Medical Humanities, led the session on "Images of the body: Representation of the nude" with Mariann Smith, a curatorial assistant at Bryn Mawr College.

Pessar explains the goals of the center and Humanities Day.

"When science was relatively ineffective, the art of medicine was emphasized," she says. "Now, science is so robust that the fulcrum has shifted. While that is marvelous, medical education has sought new ways to emphasize the art of medicine and turned to the humanities and humanism to complement clinical approaches."

The center and humanities day are designed to integrate humanities into the core medical curriculum, while tapping into resources in the greater Buffalo community. The center is collaborating with the Gold Humanism Society, UB's Anderson Gallery, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the Burchfield Penney Art Center and Just Buffalo Literary Center, among others. Pessar notes these collaborations will grow, especially once the new medical school opens downtown, because the school will be closer to the city's cultural center.

“From the time I was director of medical student education in psychiatry at UB, I have felt that people who become physicians, rather than PhDs in science, do so because there’s something that draws them empathically to people’s experience of illness and suffering,” she says, “and they wish to help them, as well as to understand the illness process.”

The Center for Medical Humanities is dedicated to exploring and enriching that sensitivity in future physicians, she explains.

“The practice of medicine is a complicated experience that draws on cultural, political, psychological and social strands,” she says. “While its bedrock is science, once you put two human beings in a room, understanding becomes much more complex.”

- See more at: http://www.buffalo.edu/ubreporter/campus/campus-host-page.host.html/content/shared/university/news/ub-reporter-articles/stories/2014/December/med_humanities_day.detail.html#sthash.cexMwHWj.dpuf