



ISSN: 2091-2749 (Print)
2091-2757 (Online)

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Submitted

8 May 2018

Accepted

2 Nov 2018

How to cite this article

P Ravi Shankar, Christopher
Rose. Student feedback about
the inaugural American
International Medical
University health humanities
module. Journal of Patan
Academy of Health Sciences.
2018Dec;5(2):90-97.

Student feedback about the inaugural American International Medical University health humanities module

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ABSTRACT

Introductions: A 'health humanity' (HH) module was facilitated for second semester medicine and first semester nursing students at the American International Medical University, Saint Lucia from September to November 2017. The study was conducted during the third week of November to obtain participant perceptions about the module and suggestions for further improvement.

Methods: Students were explained the aims and objectives of the study and invited to participate. Certain demographic information was noted. Participants indicated their degree of agreement with a set of 16 statements using a five-point scale. They were asked with which particular session, role-play and painting they identified with the most. Two suggestions to further improve the use of role-plays, future modules, interprofessional learning and paintings were also elicited.

Results: Twenty-six of the 28 students (92.8%) participated with most being either Indian or Saint Lucians from urban backgrounds. The median agreement score with various statements was 4 or above. Participants identified most with the session on 'death and dying', 'empathy' and 'health science student'; with the painting 'tree of hope'; and the scenario 'where a female medical student falls in love with a boy who was not reciprocating her feelings and with a girl who is trafficked, forced to become a sex worker returning to her family with HIV-positive. Participants agreed that the module promoted interprofessional learning.

Conclusions: Student feedback about the module was positive. It provided a platform to promote interprofessional learning among the participants, medical and nursing students.

Keywords: Caribbean, health humanities, interprofessional learning, medical students, nursing students

INTRODUCTIONS

The 'health humanities' (HH) and 'medical humanities' (MH) are playing an increasingly important role in education and practice in a diversity of healthcare disciplines.¹ The term medical humanities has been used synonymously with the health humanities by many authors. Health humanities (HH) can be an interdisciplinary endeavor which utilizes diverse disciplines like drama, literature, art, creative writing, philosophy, anthropology and history among others in the pursuit of health educational goals.² Methods from various disciplines in the humanities are used to study various aspects of healthcare education and practice.³ Medical and health humanities programs are common in developed nations and are commonly offered to health science students at both the undergraduate and the postgraduate level.^{4,5} The health humanities have a number of advantages in the education of health students. Among these, literature can introduce students to unfamiliar life situations; drama can improve communication skills and help in understanding what the patient is going through.³ Art observation has been shown to improve the visual diagnostic skills of both medical⁶ and nursing students.⁷

HH sessions have not been commonly described in offshore Caribbean medical schools. The accreditation agency for health professions education in the Caribbean, the Caribbean accreditation authority for education in medicine and other health professions (CAAM-HP) emphasizes both the medical humanities and interprofessional learning in the standards for accreditation.⁸ A medical humanities (MH) module was conducted at the Xavier University School of Medicine (XUSOM) in Aruba.⁹ Case scenarios, paintings, role-plays, debates, literature excerpts were used to explore various aspects of MH. American International Medical University (AIMU) in Saint Lucia is an offshore medical school offering courses in both medicine and nursing. The student body is predominantly from India, Nigeria and Saint Lucia with a few students from other countries. The inaugural HH module was offered to first

semester nursing and second semester medical students during the Fall 2017 semester (September-December). The two hour sessions were conducted on Monday afternoons. The module used small group activity-based sessions and learning activities like case scenarios, role-plays and interpretation of paintings among others to introduce students to various aspects of HH.

The present study was conducted with the following objectives:

- a) Study the perception of the medical and nursing students about the health humanities module at AIMU and
- b) Obtain suggestions for improvement

METHODS

The study was conducted in November 2017, among medical and nursing students who participated in a HH module at AIMU, Saint Lucia. Student feedback regarding the module was obtained using a questionnaire.

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the American International Medical University (AIMU/IRB/2017/03). Written informed consent was obtained from the participants. Information on demographics, course of study, family residence was collected from the respondents using questionnaire. They were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with a set of 16 statements using the following scale 1 = totally disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = totally agree with the statement.

They were also asked with which particular session, role-play and painting they identified the most. They were asked for two suggestions to further improve the use of role-plays and paintings; two suggestions to

improve future modules and inter-professional learning during the module. The demographic characteristics and scores were analyzed using

SPSS 20. The free text comments were tabulated.

Out of 28 students, 26 (92.8%) participated in the study. Male were 10 (38.5%), female were 13 (50%) and three were not mentioned, (Table 1).

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents (n=26)

	Characteristics	N (%)
Gender	Male	10 (38.5)
	Female	13 (50)
	Not mentioned	3 (11.5)
Course	Nursing	12 (46.2)
	Medical	14 (53.8)
Nationality	Saint Lucian	11 (42.3)
	Indian	10 (38.5)
	Nigerian	2 (7.7)
	Others	1 (3.8)
	Not mentioned	2 (7.7)

Some respondents did not complete all the required information. The median agreement scores for all the statements were above 4, (Table 2). Respondents strongly agreed that the module helped succeed in promoting their inter-professional learning.

Suggestions to further improve the use of paintings were also obtained, (Table 3). Common overall comments about the module were as follows: I enjoyed this session (3 respondents), an interesting subject involving creative skills (3 respondents), important for future practice (3 respondents), helped medical and nursing students to work as a team (2 respondents), provided a broader perspective on many issues (2 respondents),

enjoyable and pleasant atmosphere (2 respondents).

The session with which respondents identified with the most were death and dying, empathy, health science student and the patient (4 each). Students identified most with the painting 'tree of hope' by the Mexican artist, Ms. Frieda Kahlo. Students identified most with the scenario where a medical student falls in love with a boy but who was not reciprocating her feelings and who was always seen around with another girl. They also identified with the scenario of a girl who is trafficked and forced to become a sex worker and has returned to her family, with HIV-positive. The median score of effectiveness of the module was 9.

Table 2. Median agreement scores of the respondents with various statements

Statement	Median Score
Overall enjoyment of the module	4
Enjoyment of activities/elicitation sessions	4
Enjoyment of role-plays	5
Enjoyment of paintings	4
Perceived effectiveness of activities/elicitation sessions	5
Perceived effectiveness of role-plays	5
Perceived effectiveness of paintings	4
I enjoyed the health humanities module	4
The facilitators succeeded in creating a relaxed and creative atmosphere	5
The organization of the module was to my satisfaction	4
The scenarios used in the module reflect contemporary medical practice.	5
The module has introduced me to issues which would be important in my future practice.	5
The team dynamics during the module was to my satisfaction.	4.5
The time duration allotted to each session was appropriate.	4
The module will help me become a more humane practitioner.	5
The case scenarios served to introduce me to unfamiliar and problematic life situations.	5
I understood the importance of 'feelings' after completing the module.	5
The role-plays helped me to put myself in the position of the characters depicted.	5
The general arrangements of the room where the sessions were conducted were to my satisfaction.	5
The activities, paintings and case scenarios were appropriate for the module	5
The learning objectives of the sessions and of the module were clearly delineated	4.5
The module succeeded in promoting inter-professional learning	5
I would like similar sessions in future	4

Table 3. Common free-text comments of the respondents (Total N=26)

Comment	Number of respondents
Session with which you could identify the most:	
Death and dying This is something with which I have more personal and emotional experience	4
Empathy An important characteristic for nurses Learning how to empathize with others at different levels Made me realize how to be a good doctor	4
Health science student It was about school and we got to express how we felt about school I am a student presently	4
Patient-health practitioner relationship More related to us as future doctors Helped me think from the patient perspective	3
Painting with which you could identify the most	
Tree of hope It reminded me that I could overcome anything in my life	6
Hope helps us through bad situations	4
Before the shot Because, like the boy was doing, I normally check for the doctor's credentials when I visit their office	4
So American	4
City hospital Shows a good relationship between black nurse and the old white lady	4
The mountain It was amazing how the mountain represented cancer	
Suggestions to further improve the use of paintings	
More common paintings	1
Less complicated paintings	1
Paintings provided in advance	2
More diverse paintings, not necessarily medical oriented	1
Do not use an artist more than once	1
More time to discuss the paintings	1
More abstract paintings can be included	1

DISCUSSIONS

The majority of the students (26) who undertook the module participated in the survey. A large percentage of the student body was either Indian 10 (38.5%) or Saint Lucian 11 (42.3%) nationals. There were a greater percentage of female 13 (50%) participants and most students were from an urban background. Students' perception regarding the module was positive.

A study explored student perspective regarding a medical humanities module for students at XUSOM in Aruba. Students felt the module offered a different perspective compared to other basic science subjects; and the literature excerpts, paintings and small group activities were appreciated by the participants.⁹ The module encouraged active learning; and the students had fun while learning.¹⁰ This study had used a similar instrument to that used in the present study. The median scores were similar to that obtained in the present study. The topics addressed during a study¹¹ at KIST Medical College, Lalitpur, Nepal, on 1st year medical students, MH module titled 'Sparshanam' (touch in Sanskrit) was similar to the ones addressed during the present module.

In the present study, sessions with which respondents identified the most were death and dying, empathy, health science student and the patient (4 each). Most participants in the inaugural MH session at Aruba identified with the session on the 'medical student'.¹⁰ The reasons provided for this were similar to those in the present study. Doctors have found dealing with death to be exceptionally challenging.¹² The session on death and dying during the HH module introduced students to this complex topic.

In present study the painting with which most respondents identified was 'The tree of hope' by Frieda Kahlo (6), 'Before the shot' by Norman Rockwell (4), 'Mountain' by Robert Pope (4) and 'City hospital' by Alice Neel (4). At Aruba, students identified with the painting

'Death of Socrates' the most.¹⁰ In a medical school in Nepal, 'City hospital' was the painting with which students identified the most.¹³ Students provided suggestions to further strengthen the use of paintings in future modules. They wanted more common paintings, use of less complicated paintings and receive the paintings before the session. In a study conducted in Nepal, respondents were able to identify with the paintings from western artists, used during the module while some believed that these may not be entirely appropriate.¹³ Our experience suggests paintings may be helpful to overcome barriers of language and culture to a greater extent than literature.

In the study with role-plays during the sessions at XUSOM, Aruba, students identified most with the scenario of 'a medical student who was interested in music but was forced by his parents to join medicine'.¹⁰ The suggestions provided by the students were: provide more time for the activity, provide the scenarios beforehand and also ask students to create the scenarios themselves and then examine it using a role-play. The role-plays used in Nepal¹⁴ were tailored to the local scenario. Students wanted more time for the activity and use more role-plays in the module.

In the present study, both medical and nursing students participated in the module. Previous modules included only medical students. In present study, students agreed that the module succeeded in promoting their inter-professional learning, with a median score of 5. Each small group comprised both medical and nursing students. After some initial hesitation, the students learned to work together and enjoyed the experience.

Nursing faculties also participated as co-facilitators during a few sessions. A diverse perspective of views was obtained which added to the richness of the experience. Also most of the nursing students were from Saint Lucia which strengthened the 'local' perspective of the sessions.

Interprofessional learning (IPL) has a variety of benefits; and collaborative working between professionals is important to provide quality care to patients.¹⁵ It provides students with opportunities to develop the interpersonal skills needed for liaison and communication. Working together in small groups, provided students with opportunities to communicate and to understand each other's perspective. A few respondents also provided suggestions to further improve IPL. Another study mentioned that students from different health disciplines had little idea about each other's roles.¹⁶

Home assignments and better gender distribution among groups were suggested. The nursing students were all female and a large proportion of the medical students were also female. The suggestions received will be considered while facilitating future sessions.

The study also had limitations. The number of participants in the module was low which reflected the lower number of students in the particular cohort. Student opinion was collected only using a questionnaire and was not correlated with information obtained from other sources.

CONCLUSIONS

Student feedback about the health humanities module was positive. The module provided a platform to promote interprofessional learning among the participants, medical and nursing students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank all the students who had participated in the module and the study and acknowledge the support of nurse Leon and nurse Amsa in the module, thank Mr. Arun, IT Manager for providing logistic support.

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