

Chapter 12. Medicine and the muse: opportunities for connection through education, research and shared experience

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Abstract

Introduction: The Stanford Medicine and the Muse: Medical Humanities and the Arts Program is based at a research intensive medical school, which trains physician-scientists and lauds bench and translational scientific endeavours. However, traits which lead to scientific excellence, such as curiosity and interest in interdisciplinary work, are also traits necessary for innovation in health humanities. The Program began over 15 years ago as a bud of a research grant program for Stanford medical students. Initial emphasis on arts and humanities scholarly work as a track in medical education led to a multi-pronged Program with education, research, community-building and outreach missions.

Methodology: Three of the multiple components of the Program will be examined. 1. The Biomedical Ethics and Medical Humanities Scholarly Concentration which has supported over 120 medical student projects. A qualitative study of alumni of the Scholarly Concentration is currently being analysed 2. Cross-disciplinary elective courses such as The Art of Observation, held in the University's art museums with peer-peer interactions between medical and art history graduate students. 3. Community-building through creative writing and literature discussion groups for medical students, health professionals, and the support of Pegasus Physician Writers.

Discussion: By initiating the Stanford Medicine and the Muse Program as part of the research mission at the medical school, the Program gained traction in the local culture. Networking across the University and beyond enables meaningful exchange and new opportunities. Program expansion, including writing and literature groups, respond to needs for community building and wellness experiences.

Keywords: medical education, humanities, arts.

Theoretical background

Stanford University, founded in 1891 in Palo Alto, California, is a premier research and educational institution. It houses seven schools, only one of which is health-related, and over seven hundred major buildings, including two art museums and multiple gallery and art installations. Although the majority of undergraduate majors are in science, technology and engineering, stellar resources exist for scholarly engagement at the intersections of the sciences and arts/humanities. As a University, Stanford has more graduate than undergraduate students. Similarly, the School of Medicine has more graduate (PhD/MS) than professional (MD) students, and places emphasis on student involvement in research and scholarly endeavours no matter what degree is pursued.

For a health humanities program to thrive, cohere and gain respect in this environment, opportunities for students to engage in scholarly activity would be critical. Although in the 1990s elective courses and individual events, such as physician-author readings were offered, it was not until recognition of the scholarly potential in the area of health humanities that an actual program developed. The model of a bud on a tree, that is, growing a new program as a branch from an existing structure, even though that existing structure had no element akin to the bud, is presented as a means to integrate a new, interdisciplinary program into a largely science-based school. This practical method facilitates visibility, community building, and collaborations.

Philosophically, the program exists in four overlapping domains. These domains are central to the purpose of a Health Humanities program, that is, 1.) improve health; 2.) encourage inquiry; 3.) promote wellness and

community building; and 4.) provide a structure for better understanding of who and why we are.

This paper focuses on three of the multiple components of the Stanford Medicine and the Muse: Medical Humanities and the Arts Program: biomedical ethics and medical humanities scholarly concentration, the development of collaborations across disciplines through courses, and the evolution to emphasize writing and literature based on interests of the community served.

Method / Description of the experience

This paper provides an overview of program development at one medical school.

Results

Biomedical Ethics and Medical Humanities Scholarly Concentration

Stanford medical students are encouraged to engage in research during their educational years, indeed, the majority of students will add a year to their medical education in order to pursue research. Each MD-only student at the Stanford University School of Medicine must choose an area of scholarly concentration (SC) as a graduation requirement. Each concentration must offer core courses required for concentrators, elective courses, project mentorship, and facilitation of project presentations. The SC program was initiated as part of broad medical curricular reform in 2003, although the medical scholars program, which provides grants and academic credit for students doing research at the medical school began many years before

(Meites, Bein, & Shafer, 2003). Currently there are 15 SCs; some students choose to concentrate in two separate areas. Each student develops a course and project plan approved by the concentration director (Shafer, 2016).

The two core courses required for the Biomedical Ethics and Medical Humanities (BEMH) scholarly concentration are introductory seminars, one in ethics and the other in medical humanities and the arts. Elective courses are offered by faculty associated with bioethics or medical humanities, but students are also encouraged to explore the vast course offerings across the University campus which are related to a variety of topics such as health and society, comparative literature, global health, design thinking, and studio art.

Extracurricular opportunities include early clinical experiences, for example, participating in hospital ethics consultations and utilizing observations skills training in the operating suite. Student-initiated activities are supported. Additionally, students organize and lead the annual spring symposium entitled *Medicine and the Muse*, which features student presentations and a keynote speaker, and attracts hundreds of attendees.

Scholarly projects can be funded by a competitive proposal process through the medical scholars program. Of the 135 BEMH funded projects from 2000-2016, nearly one-third (43) were creative writing projects. Outcomes include published books, articles, essays, poems, and web-based resources, and are updated on the *Stanford Medicine and the Muse* website (The Stanford Medicine and the Muse website, 2017). Students present their projects at local, national and international conferences.

Currently, a qualitative study is underway of graduates of the BEMH SC (from 2007 - the first year of graduates, through 2014) in order to evaluate

longer term impact of the SC. Using structured interviews and a data saturation model, a codebook of responses was created. Thematic analysis is ongoing to examine domains such as impact on clinical practice, wellness, community building, and professional identity formation.

Cross-disciplinary Courses

A hallmark of biomedical ethics and medical humanities is the cross-disciplinary nature of the fields. That is, not only is the content of multiple disciplines, such as history, literary studies, and anthropology, incorporated into courses aimed at providing a context to medical care and illness, but the methodologies and critical lenses are also used to broaden thinking and provide tools to examine the cultures of medicine.

Numerous courses both at the medical school and across the University utilize this cross-disciplinary approach, but the focus here will be on two. The first, *The Art of Observation: Enhancing Clinical Skills Through Observation*, is taught at the two art museums on campus, Cantor Arts Center and the Anderson Collection at Stanford. Art history PhD graduate students facilitate the development of observation skills of preselected works in the galleries, enable participants to articulate observations, encourage students to back up any interpretive statement with the data (the work) before them, and allow ambiguity to be tolerated - and even celebrated. After the gallery observation and discussion sessions, students gather in a conference room in the museum, and hear a clinical correlations interactive presentation by a medical school faculty member. Session themes have included narrative (family medicine), childhood (pediatrics), brain and body (neurology), and death (pathology). Medical students are encouraged to practice their observation and interpretation skills in their clinical work.

The second course is one of the core BEMH courses, *Medical Humanities and the Arts*. The course begins in the Stanford Medical History Center of the medical library, where students can see, learn about, and even touch some of the historical book holdings, such as *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* by Andreas Vesalius (1543), Arabic texts by Ibn al-Nafis (13th century), and *Motu cordis* by William Harvey (1639). Other sessions focus on topics such as global health and close reading techniques in fiction, medical anthropology and cultural assumptions, film and health, play-back theatre, and posttraumatic stress disorder. A major component of the course is the development and presentation of student projects in medical humanities. The feedback from the class on works-in-progress help students hone their ideas and sharpen their project focus. All courses are open to non-concentrators as well, but limited in enrollment to facilitate the intrinsic seminar nature.

Writing, Literature & Medicine, and Pegasus Physician Writers

As can be deduced from the significant number of writing projects, narrative-based endeavors are of major interest to the community of health care providers and learners at Stanford. This interest reflects the historical roots in the United States of medical humanities as the study of literature and medicine. Writing opportunities and literature discussion series offered by Stanford Medicine and the Muse are thus a response to the basic yet ever-growing interest in these areas.

Writing opportunities include: a creative writing for medical students course, writing workshops open to anyone with an affiliation to Stanford Medicine (e.g., social workers, staff, physicians, trainees, alumni, nurses, volunteers), writing contests, writers forums with readings, writing

embedded in events (for instance, the keynote speaker at the Medicine and the Muse symposium has included writers, such as Khaled Hosseini, Anne Lamott, Malcolm Gladwell, Anne Fadiman, Abraham Verghese, Perri Klass, Rafael Campo, Stephen Bergman (Samuel Shem), and Sheri Fink), a writer-in-residence (Laurel Braitman, PhD), a student journal: H&P, and in-depth writing projects both in the funded medical scholars framework and outside. In particular, students and physicians-in-training are encouraged to hone communication skills through writing, storytelling, and the spoken word.

Housestaff are also encouraged to attend drop-in literature discussion sessions held at the hospital. The sessions, sponsored by the Stanford Wellness Center, are facilitated by the assistant director of the Medicine and the Muse Program, Jacqueline Genovese, MA, and cover topics such as the patient experience, discrimination and prejudice, burn-out and compassion. Separate sessions are held for physician faculty, who read brief pieces of literature prior to the session for discussion. Evaluations of participants have indicated increased empathy for one's colleagues, which can lead to a stronger sense of community (Gavi, Genovese, Trockel, & Murphy, 2017).

Pegasus Physician Writers, established in 2008 and directed by child psychiatrist Hans Steiner, MD, serves almost 100 physicians and medical students. Although some meet only virtually, approximately 60 members meet monthly in 5 separate groups of 10-12 members per group. Each group meeting is used to workshop nascent writing pre-circulated to one's group. A series of Stanford Bookstore readings celebrate the publication of physician authored books, and a separate collaboration of the poets and the ensemble-in-residence at Stanford, the St. Lawrence String Quartet, leads to an annual concert and poetry reading open to the community. Numerous books, essays and poems which have been workshopped through Pegasus

Physician Writers have been published and presented at readings, local and abroad. (The Pegasus Physician Writers at Stanford, 2017).

Discussion

In sum, the Stanford Medicine and the Muse Program provides a home for anyone interested in the multiple intersections between the arts, humanities, qualitative social sciences, and medicine. Originally developed as an offshoot of a grant program designed to encourage Stanford medical students to pursue research studies, the Medicine and the Muse Program has grown to encompass a wider audience, establish collaborations across the University and beyond, and provide curricular and extracurricular offerings.

By providing resources and structure, yet remaining responsive to changing interests and needs of the Stanford community, the Program seeks to nurture curiosity in and empathy for others (such as patients and co-workers), foster the search for the complex contexts of illness and caregiving, promote scholarship, and encourage broad as well as in-depth knowledge, understanding and learning. Explorations of wellness and community-building through the arts, in particular, enable the externalization and sharing of experiences, actualize the benefits of expression, and nurture a changed perception of the world with the goal of enhanced engagement. By teaching the tools and skill sets from cross-disciplinary methodologies, the Medicine and the Muse Program ultimately hopes to encourage meaning making and meaning discovery in health care. With a deeper understanding of the human nature of health, illness and healthcare, the Program aims to value the integration of various facets of

one's life such that fragmentation is diminished. In this way, health care is incorporated more into one's concept of self rather than in conflict with other aspects of life.

Health humanities programs exist or develop in a myriad of ways. One way, as exemplified by the Stanford Medicine and the Muse Program, is to examine the local culture of the school and its mission, and to bud from an existing program or curricular reform movement. Flexibility, inclusion and the provision of resources enable growth by nurturing cross-disciplinarity and connection.

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