



A workshop on relevance of teaching humanities and social sciences in health professions education

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Context

The importance of humanities and social sciences (HASS) in the development of empathetic and effective health professionals is well-documented in literature.¹ However, in Pakistan it is not part of the discourse on health education. The ever-growing emphasis on social determinants of health requires an understanding of society that is best provided by the diverse disciplines within the ambit of HASS. To introduce the relevance of teaching HASS in health professions' education, a peer-reviewed workshop was conducted in the joint Association for Excellence in Medical Education (AEME) 2013 Conference and 16th Aga Khan University (AKU) National Symposium.

Reason for the idea

The workshop was aimed at health professions teaching faculty interested in incorporating HASS in health professions' education. Accordingly, the workshop objectives were:

- Identify the relevance of humanities and social sciences in health professions education.
- Identify possible pathways of integrating humanities and social sciences in health professions education.

It was heartening to note a growing realization that HASS is important for the development of health professionals, evident by the fact that there were participants from diverse backgrounds from both public and private institutions from all over Pakistan. In addition to medical doctors, participants included an Educational Technologist, Director of Medical Education, Senior Registrar and a nursing student.

Methods

A participatory approach was used, whereby all participants actively engaged in the discussion. Participants were particularly curious to explore the role of HASS in undergraduate medical education;

therefore, half the journey of understanding was traversed. The readiness to learn is perhaps the best -stepping stone to learning.

First, the notion of 'relevance' was discussed with the workshop participants. Next, utilizing the common sense understanding of HASS, participants enumerated what could be included in a HASS curriculum. Once these two ideas were articulated, a presentation was made on AKU's HASS curriculum. This gave the participants the opportunity to review what they had identified as possible HASS topics that could be included in their curriculums. Through this approach, the participants were not 'told' why HASS is relevant, and what should be taught. Instead, they were required to identify what *they* thought was relevant. This approach establishes an ownership of what is to be done and leaves the learner with the freedom to take decisions, thereby honing and shaping thinking.

Evaluation

At the end of the workshop, an informal feedback was taken from the participants. They appreciated the method that allowed them to deliberate over the importance of HASS in health professions education and expressed the need to stay connected to exchange their efforts in taking forward the task of developing HASS curriculum for their institutions. This is a significant step and the call of the day.

Reference

1. Brett-MacLean, Pamela. Use of the Arts in Medical and Health Professional Education. University of Alberta Health Sciences Journal, 2007; 4(1): 26-29.

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