Opening Medical Humanities to the World: Reflecting on Library Support for the Medical Humanities Lab

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Librarians can lead and support medical humanities initiatives on their campuses.

Opening Medical Humanities to the World: Reflecting on Library Support for the Medical Humanities Lab
Lisa A. Palmer, Tess Grynoch, Regina Raboin
Lamar Soutter Library, University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS)

The mission of the Medical Humanities Lab at UMass Medical School is to integrate the arts and humanities into medical education and healthcare through student, faculty, and community engagement in a cultural, medical humanities (CMH) curriculum.

Leaders: David Hatem, MD; Hugh Silk, MD; Regina Raboin, MLSIS

The First Two Years of the UMMS Humanities Lab

The UMMS Humanities Lab is an interdisciplinary field of medicine that uses methods, concepts, and content from the humanities (literature, philosophy, ethics, history and religion), social sciences (anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, sociology), and the arts (art history, theater, film, multimedia and visual arts) to investigate illness, pain, disability, suffering, healing, therapeutic relationships, and other aspects of healthcare education and practice. (1,2)

Benefits of Medical Humanities
• Foster empathy, compassionate behavior; humanism, capacity to be patient-centered (3-4)
• Develop awareness of different perspectives, bring unconscious bias and assumptions into focus (5-6)
• Reduce burnout, increase well-being, solidify self-care (6,7)
• Improve teamwork and communication (5)
• Cultivate professional conduct in physicians, reinforce knowledge and skills in clinical ethics, promote reflection (7,8)
• Develop tangible skills in writing, presenting, publishing, research, project management (7)

“Medical humanities” is an interdisciplinary field of medicine that uses methods, concepts, and content from the humanities (literature, philosophy, ethics, history and religion), social sciences (anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, sociology), and the arts (art history, theater, film, multimedia and visual arts) to investigate illness, pain, disability, suffering, healing, therapeutic relationships, and other aspects of healthcare education and practice. (1,2)

Facilitators
• Library well-respected on campus and connected to medical humanities and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on campus
• Support of our library colleagues, especially Kristine Sjostedt, without whose participation the Medical Humanities Lab would not exist
• Limited integration in curriculum
• Keeping momentum going for all-volunteer effort
• Range of expertise available across campus

Challenges
• Developing clarity of purpose
• Developing a shared vision
• Developing and supporting very busy faculty-clinicians and students
• Student and staff turnover
• Student and staff turnover
• Keeping momentum going for all-volunteer effort
• Making the effort sustainable
• Limited funding and resources
• Accessing to all three schools on campus (School of Medicine, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, and the Graduate School of Nursing)

Additional Projects
• PMIDah – Collection of poetry, written reflections, images, and video from the UMMS community reflecting on the year 2020.
• Art Walks at UMass Memorial Hospital – Pamphlets designed to accompany timed walks around the hospital describing the artwork.
• Gerald F. Berlin Prize – Annual prize for writing at UMMS.
• Human Side of Medicine – Website dedicated to the human side of medicine.
• MURMURS – Online literary and visual arts publication of UMMS Medical Students.
• Thursday Morning Memo – Communicating clinical success stories within the Family Medicine & Community Health Department.
• Promoting humanities events on campus such as:
  • Screening of Black Magic in Winter Coats
  • Private Guns Public Health Talk

Available in the UMMS Medical Library

Have suggestions for the UMMS Humanities Lab or have a medical humanities initiative at your institution? We would love to hear from you!
https://umassmed.libwizard.com/f/acrl2021-humanities-lab

Footnotes