



What's New in Dental Humanities: A Review for Professionals and Practitioners

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The busy, over-worked dental professional and practitioner can barely find time to keep up with the latest developments in journals and monographs relating to her specialized areas of practice and interests; much less peruse the scattered writings pertaining to the broadly based field of dental humanities. Those dental professionals who are not up-to-date on dental humanities can find solace in that very little has been provided for them by historians, psychologists, and related writers in the arts and social sciences. Beginning now and continuing in forthcoming issues we will be providing our readers with reviews and references to pertinent, difficult to find literature that will offer insight into humanistic perspectives which can impact and improve patient-related aspects of dental practice [1].

One recent remedy to the overlooked area of dental humanities has been the appearance of the Journal of Dental Humanities (available online at <http://www.journalofdentalhumanities.com/>). Noting appropriately in its inaugural issue that "The time has arrived for a journal dedicated to exploring the connection between the profession of dentistry, the humanities, and the social sciences," the journal has featured an historical account of personal recollections by Dr. H. Barry Waldman, Distinguished Teaching Professor, Department of General Dentistry at Stony Brook School of General Dentistry [2,3]. In his article Dr. Waldman recalls the disdain for behavioral considerations in dental practice found early in his career but notes how the current climate has dramatically altered previous notions to a point where now the "humanities...are [viewed as] an essential component of our profession" [3].

Elsewhere, Zahra and Dunton, in an intriguing article in the British Dental Journal report that a number of medical schools in the US and UK have introduced arts and humanities courses in order to balance the statistic-driven demands of evidence-based medicine with a more pluralistic and intuitive understanding of human behavioral ambiguities. They describe a pilot program initiated by the Cultural Institute and the Dental Institute at King's College, London that sought to improve communicative skills required in clinical encounters. This

hands-on application of 'clinical humanities', incorporated an 'arts-based inquiry,' a term coined by Louise Younie, Clinical Senior Lecturer at The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, to describe student exploration and discussion of various art-works and subsequent role-playing and performance [4-5].

The interdisciplinary approach described in Zahra and Dunton's study sought to situate students in dentistry's social and cultural history by visiting the Old Operating Theatre and Herb Garret on London's St. Thomas Street, where the museum of surgical history brings to life a depiction of what is one of the world's oldest surviving operating theatres. Students then studied paintings at the Courtauld Institute of Art, one of the most prestigious institutions in the world for art history and known particularly for its collection of French Impressionist paintings. Finally, dental students discussed ceramics under the guidance of an internationally known ceramicist and undertook theatrical role-playing with a professional actor. Their study, described in detail in the BDJ article, provides interesting possibilities for how the dental educator and practitioner might creatively engage the arts and humanities in order to gain a fresh perspective on professional work with patients [5].

References

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