

Individual Research Project Presentations Day 9th June 2025, Kent and Medway Medical School.

The role of the humanities in the medical curriculum: A cross-sectional survey of UK medical students

Student^a: Maya Pirie | **Supervisor(s)^b:** Dr Frances Wedgwood

Abstract

Background: Current literature suggests that the humanities can serve as a valuable addition to medical curricula, with several papers suggesting how medical students want these activities to be implemented within their degree. However, most studies focus on single institutions or specific humanities programmes. This presented an opportunity to explore the student perspective using broader sample sizes. This study explores the opinions of UK medical students regarding the impact of the arts and humanities upon their professional and personal development, and how they wish for these practices to be implemented into their curricula.

Methods: An online questionnaire was constructed for data collection. A parallel, mixed-methods approach was adopted, utilising a mixture of close-ended Likert-type questions and open-ended free text responses. The resultant quantitative data underwent frequency and comparative analysis, with free text responses thematically analysed.

Results: Participants totalled 87 students from 14 UK universities. The majority reported access to the humanities through their degree, with 43 students having already participated in these activities. Those who had already participated displayed the most positive views, and those with access but no personal experience were found to be the least positive. Despite these variations, most students predicted benefits to participation. The majority of participants wished for greater inclusion of the humanities within medical curricula, however indicated that these should not be mandatory or assessed. Thematic analysis revealed 5 themes: 'personal growth and clinical competence'; 'divergent thinking'; 'supporting emotional wellbeing'; 'reinforcing clinical knowledge' and 'student choice'.

Conclusions: The results of this study indicate that many but not all UK medical students have access to creative and humanities based teaching in their curricula. They hold positive views of the medical humanities and identify multiple benefits from exposure to creative and humanities-based teaching, and want more opportunities to explore these. Further exploration using larger sample sizes across more institutions is recommended to understand more fully the benefits to UK medical students of humanities teaching.

Incorporating students' perspectives may also help to enhance curriculum planning and improve the delivery of arts and humanities activities within medicine.

Keywords: Medical education | Humanities | Student perspective | Professional development | Personal development

^a Maya Pirie, 4th Year Medical Student, Kent and Medway Medical School, Canterbury, United Kingdom

^b Dr Frances Wedgwood, Associate Clinical Lecturer, Kent and Medway Medical school, and Academic GP

Main contact email: m.pirie64@kmms.ac.uk