

Narrative medicine as a teaching tool during early clinical exposure

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Background

How can we help novice undergraduates be aware of the characteristics of family medicine during clinical placements? How can we encourage beginner students to develop their reflexivity from the beginning of their studies? Teaching that integrates the principles of narrative medicine can help meet these challenges.

Questions

How can the principles of narrative medicine, and in particular the practice of writing, serve the educational goals of family medicine?

Methods

Upon completion of their internship in a family doctor's office, second-year bachelor students at Geneva University Medical School must produce a report on their experience. A **new pilot project** now offers the option to transform their report into a work of fiction. The primary requirement of this project is to narrate an encounter involving a doctor, a patient, and a trainee. In addition, students are encouraged to deepen their understanding of the patient's and doctor's experience throughout the writing process, which is one of the main aims of narrative medicine.



Main findings

Over the past two years, ten students have chosen to write their internship report in the form of a fictional narrative. The evaluation of their narratives showed overall that the students were able to present their observations in a creative work of fiction that illustrated an understanding of complex biomedical and non-biomedical issues of the unique doctor-patient relationship they had witnessed or experienced personally. Most of the work they produced was of high quality, two of them receiving the faculty's best internship report award.

Conclusion

The use of narrative medicine, through the writing of a fictional account of an encounter between a physician, a patient, and a trainee, allows students facing their first clinical experience in a family physician's office to develop their reflexivity and their attention to the patient's experience.

