

Exploring art with foundation doctors: *reflecting on clinical experience*

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Background

The role of art in helping trainees to reflect on their learning and development is acknowledged, but poorly understood. An already over-crowded curriculum may emphasise the purely clinical nature of learning, and the opportunity to reflect on experience through other means may be limited.

Aim

This innovative teaching session aimed to encourage foundation trainees to step outside the consulting room, and to reinterpret their clinical experiences through reflective writing about art.

What we did

A group of foundation trainees (n.5), their tutor (KT) and a researcher (SS) visited the Wellcome Gallery, London. Whilst there, trainees were encouraged to seek out art works which resonated with a clinical encounter or experience, and to write a reflective piece about one. The group met again in a follow-up focus group, during which they discussed their writing and its impact on them as trainees and doctors.

What was found

The reflective writing of the group collectively demonstrated engagement with themes commensurate with deeper levels of learning: the feelings, assumptions, beliefs and values of clinical practice. The broad themes underlying their writing concerned attitudes and assumptions about disease, understanding how their views and beliefs as doctors may be shaped by their world-view and appreciation of the nature of evidence-based practice.

A fuller description of the session will appear in *Education for Primary Care*.

Conclusion

The strength of this session was that it was not a specific and focused supervised learning event, rather it offered the freedom for participants to link and construct their reflections on clinical practice as suited them at the time. The responsibility for learning was shared amongst all participants, and it opened up new areas for discussion and learning.

Extracts from two trainees' reflective writing on an exhibit from the "Medicine Now" exhibition.

'I Can Not Help the Way I Feel' by John Isaacs, 2003

This sculpture prompted reflection on clinical cases linked to obesity for two trainees. For one it brought to mind social perceptions of obesity and the trainee's own assumptions about obese patients. This led to reflection upon how clinical judgement may be shaped from within.

"I found the piece stimulated me to think about obese patients in a different way. Although obesity is the root cause of many health problems, I realised I was just seeing an overweight patient and not the patient as a person. The piece helped me to reflect on this as the sculpture depicts an obese person without a head/face."

For the second trainee it brought to mind a difficult consultation with an obese patient. In the course of the consultation the interpersonal dynamic between the patient and doctor noticeably changed, and was interpreted to indicate that the patient had become offended by the approach to advising him on weight loss taken by the trainee. In this case, an emotional reaction to the sculpture prompted reflection on attitudes towards the patient and whether the trainee's body language in particular had unintentionally conveyed inner feelings during the consultation.

"I did not take probably enough chance to explore his expectations and struggles regarding his weight before I jumped in with my opinions."

