

Introspection and creativity for future success: the art of medicine

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Is medicine an art form? Is it a profession within which we (in the metaphorical sense) create art by helping our patients? Or is art separate from medicine – a thing to practice in order to explore and gain a deeper understanding of our own emotions? I think it would be interesting to know what people's initial thoughts are. I hope having a background in art and a security in my own continuous medical education are enough evidence to prove I am indeed qualified to talk on both topics and how they interlink (they definitely do).

In domains such as medicine and engineering that branch away from humanities, art projects are often assigned in order to encourage creation and introspection. Our professors and mentors are aware of the benefits of being creative for our mental well-being¹, but also for our practice. If you understand the reason why you react the way you do or know ways to release tension (through things that you enjoy and often do not require much mental energy), you can be happier in future interactions with people. In this feature you will find a copy of one of my works – I do not have the time I used to for art, and this piece was produced as part of a student project – without it, the piece never would have been created. The projects reflect the universities' own introspection, and their recognition of our needs.² In this way, art is separate from medicine. It is a way to ensure fully compassionate care and patient satisfaction. It is an advantageous adjunct for preventing burnout.

The benefits of these projects are definitely felt, as seen in the art submitted for the journal, and the artists' own words! All our artists have shown a great love for creating, and a deeper thinking on some of the most important topics in medicine, such as organ donation. These medical students were not assigned to create art for us - submissions are voluntary. This poses the question: do we create art out of necessity, because someone has asked us, or is it just human nature? Jean-Martin Charcot, "the father of modern neurology," was a fantastic painter, and he used this and his visual memory to follow patterns of disease in medicine and anatomy. His drawings of anatomical pathology were one of his key methods of teaching clinical diagnosis³ – and with a background in treating "hysteria", it is no wonder that one of his students was Sigmund Freud.⁴ Who knows, maybe the art we create today will – in the future – also birth the next parent of a much controversial, but highly influential, pseudoscience.

I believe art is not its own separate thing from medicine. I think medicine is art (with the risk of sounding like a Romantic – but even Keats trained as a doctor before becoming one of the most revered poets, after all).⁵ Art is more than a painting – it is in the way you speak to a patient, in putting lavender oil on the birthing pillow of an anxious mother, in bringing a magnifying glass with a torch to an elderly man with COPD that used to play the guitar with Bob Dylan and now wants to read about those days. The rules of fine art can also help you understand medicine better – a composition is a very carefully thought-out pattern, as are most diagnostics – learning to see things as a whole, a sum of all their separate parts, is an extremely useful transferable skill. Being able to recognise the golden triangle in a Renaissance painting is the same as being able to identify which blood vessels are pumping within your patient's arm

– or paw. Understanding art comes with understanding people. And understanding people comes with medicine.

Everyone has the capacity to create and appreciate art. There is little evidence of a clear distinction between "left" and "right" brain-minded people to use it as an excuse.⁶ Some people were more encouraged to do so from a young age, whilst others are now, later, encouraged by INSPIRE. I remember my father buying me my first easel in the autumn I was seven – a framing shop on the corner of a block of flats, a golden haze seemingly evaporating off the artist's materials (it was closing time) – and most of all, the joy I felt. At INSPIRE we invite submissions of art from all students within the medical sectors – dentistry, medicine, and veterinary science – giving these students an opportunity to showcase their creative side that they would not typically have. The promise of being published is a great encouragement for the creation of art!

We need to start seeing medicine as an art form separate from the traditional sense of the word. For fear of sounding redundant, we are inherently artists in the jobs we do. It is time we show that off. Therefore, we ask you for all and any type of art: sculptures, paintings, photography, short stories (3000 words max), cartoons/comics, poetry (we need more medics turned poets, I think), whatever form of expression you might prefer. There is no deadline, no time limit, no pressure. Creation is in your hands – what can we learn from it?

I would like to finally thank the artists of this feature: Aiman, Agbo, Judy, and Megan, whose art is also present on our cover. They have done a marvellous job at proving the importance of art, and a great love for medicine as an art form, which I admire.

References

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Aiman Dilnawaz

My name is Aiman, and I am a final-year Bristol medical student. I am currently based at Gloucester Academy and am looking forward to starting my foundation job in Bristol. I have always been a keen painter and have enjoyed the creative element which Bristol medical school has always offered us. This painting is one of the recent projects which I have done as a part of my placement.

As the title of my painting suggests, this is inspired by the famous book 'This is Going to Hurt' by Adam Kay, which has also recently been featured as a drama series. As a part of our GP block this year, we had to do a project under the title: 'Outside The Box.'

Maybe reading this book and watching the series just before becoming a foundation doctor was not the best time, however, it got me thinking. So many negatives about the job have been highlighted in the book as well as the series - in my painting, I have conveyed through colours that there are not just challenges in future professional life but also successes, satisfaction, and happiness. Sometimes a constant reminder of difficulty can make us overlook the positive aspects, and through this painting, I have tried to bring forth the good part of our profession.

The concept of the doctor standing in the hospital corridor portrays the uncertainty which I have personally felt from time to time, and

I have come to accept that this will be the case at the start of my medical career. However, there is always light at the end of the tunnel, which guides our path as conceptualised here. With a balance of different emotions side by side in the painting, it depicts that every difficulty and uncertainty is balanced out by ease and positivity. Good relationships with your spouse, family and friends can be one's support, but sometimes due to immense stress they can be impacted resulting in tension, and this is conveyed by the top figures on the left and right of the painting.

You love most parts of your profession, as shown here by the doctor holding the newborn, but on the contrary, the nature of this profession demands time, and time can be one of the worst enemies when you are trying to balance life and work. The piano in the painting represents one's interests, which are there to de-stress and take one's attention away from stressful and sad situations. Satisfaction in a job is followed by the regret of certain decisions you make as portrayed by the figure on the bottom right of the painting.

In this painting, I have tried to portray the difficulties alongside positives which are often brushed aside under the carpet and eventually ignored or taken for granted. Medicine is a journey full of surprises and I have personally tasted the flavour of this during medical school - particularly in my final year. This is a process of continuous learning, character development and learning to control emotions when facing uncertainty. This painting will be a reminder for me to enter my professional life with the aim that this is not going to hurt.





Agbo Pethiyagoda

My name is Abgo and I am a first-year medical student at Cardiff University. I love public speaking and am interested in surgery. I am also a great fan of sports and an even bigger fan of LEGO (I mean, who is not!). Also, I would never say no to cheesecake!

I tried my best to stick to the use of recycled materials so that the environment was not harmed during making this piece. The heart was made from crushed foil that I collected from takeaway containers I had ordered. The gloves are filled with cardboard from a box that was in the recycling bin.

In terms of symbolism, the heart represents the lives of everyone who donate their bodies to science. The rocks: the Earth. And the hands: everyone involved in healthcare.

The heart staying above the rocks (Earth) symbolises the fact that the wonderful people who donated their bodies to science decided to stay with us to help more people, instead of going back to Mother Earth.

The hands are a way of saying thank you to these amazing individuals. In addition, it is also a promise to say that we all would look after all of them with care, love and respect.

Very simply, this piece is to say "Thank You." to everyone who donates their bodies in the name of science.





Judy Tsui

I am Judy and I am a second-year medical student at Cardiff University. I have a strong interest in both arts and science. Being a medical student can be very stressful sometimes and painting is a way for me to relax my mind and express my emotions. I love using many colours and having strong contrast in my artwork, and the boost my creativity and imagination have through painting.

This is an acrylic painting (60x50cm) I made during my three-weeks-long hotel quarantine in Hong Kong in the summer of 2021. Being an

international student, COVID made it very hard for me to travel back home and I had to go through a very long quarantine last year before seeing my family! Three weeks in quarantine was definitely a very difficult period for me – being locked in my room and the one thing that I did was stare out of the window every day. It made me appreciate the beauty of home and the time I get to spend with family and friends. The three weeks slowed down my life and made me reflect on how lucky I am to be able to travel and see my family, while a lot of people suffered from tragic loss through the pandemic. Therefore, this is a painting for me to remember this journey.





Sofia Rosca-Velea

My name is Sofia, and I am a second-year medical student at the University of Bristol. Based on a small but striking moment with a memorable patient on a geriatric ward, this art piece explores the passing of time and the care we exert into keeping it at bay.

The patient had just requested help with taking their watch off, and as three of us all scrambled to figure out the locking system – a very secure watch, compliments to the manufacturers! – it weighed on me that this might be the only bit of out-of-hospital identity the patient had left, and we were now removing it. I could tell the patient's morale lowered as they became quieter and made a comment that they could not deny their age any longer, even if before their conversation had been quick and witty and fun. When before they had been so in control of their own life – the watch was expensive, one they might have worked hard for – now they couldn't even take it off without help. The change in mood struck me a lot.

On a geriatric ward you will often see a lack of autonomy, not just through a set daily schedule including shower and eating times, but also through clothing, activity choices and inability to move about.

I believe this can take a real toll on patients, especially patients that were very active in previous years, and the time we spend with them is really important in helping them regain a sense of independence and identity – as this is the only time they get to make their own choices.

While initially the artwork started as simply an artistic interpretation of removal of the watch, halfway through I remembered something a nurse had mentioned whilst on the same shift: that five, or 10 years ago, people we see on wards now, would have been at home, especially in the later stages. Now we can provide such a level of care that they remain 'better' for longer, compared to being at home. In a way we are caring for time, as the hands represent, nurturing and keeping it running. I think that's admirable and exciting – the hands are in colourful acrylic to show this, and their lack of definition symbolises the fluidity and ever-changing nature of the interventions we provide.

Painting is the best way for me to express myself creatively, and this is why I chose to explore this encounter this way. The watch, classic and bright against the darkness of the background is not perfect – we cannot guarantee perfect results every time, but we can try; a hand drawn circle is rarely unflawed.

