



Poetry: Response of Medical Students to Use in Teaching Dermatology

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Poetry is one of the major categories of literature which is characterized by having a meter form, rhyme, rhythm and other figurative expressions. It can be incorporated in to other forms of literature such as prose and drama as it was the focus of the World Poetry Day 2023 theme: 'Be a Poet even in Prose'. Poetry is being encouraged even in the teaching of medicine particularly in countries such as Australia, United States of America and United Kingdom. This study focused on the response of medical students to poems that were part of the lecture slides.

Methods: Short excerpts of poems taken from a collection of poems titled 'Scar Songs' formed part of the lecture slides for two different topics on two different days during the dermatology posting for the fifth year medical students. The response of the medical students was judged by a voice vote, hand count, body language and attention paid to the poems during the reading.

Results: Majority, 75 % raised their hands in affirmative that they enjoyed the class. There were positive emotions such as smiles and laughter by the students. On the lecture assessment form a student stated that the use of poetry aided his understanding.

Conclusion: Poetry can be enjoyed by medical students. It can be used as a teaching aid in dermatology.

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Keywords: Dermatology; education; medical; poetry; student.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poetry is one of the major categories of literature which is characterized by having a meter form, rhyme, rhythm and other figurative expressions [1]. It can be incorporated into other forms of literature such as prose and drama as it was the focus of the World Poetry Day 2023 theme : 'Be a Poet even in Prose'. Poetry is being encouraged even in the teaching of medicine particularly in countries such as Australia, United States of America and United Kingdom. It is known to enhance empathy that drives doctors to give their best to their patients. [2] This study focused on the response of medical students to poems that were part of the lecture slides.

2. AIM

The aim of this study is to assess the reception of poetry by medical students when used in the teaching dermatology.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The timetable had included a day to focus on dermatology education (OSCE & Poetry). On the first day of commencement of dermatology posting the students received a lecture on 'Common bacterial infections'. A poem on impetigo formed part of the lecture slides. The poem was read out to the students as part of the lecture. They received the lecture note which contained the poem. No evaluation was done that day on how they saw the poem. They were mostly attentive during the lecture.

The students had their scheduled lectures on 'Common papulosquamous lesions- Lichen planus and Psoriasis' which was on the third day of the dermatology posting. Short excerpts of two different poems were put up after the lecture- first on *Lichen planus* and second on Psoriasis. The two poems were taken from a collection of poems titled 'Scar Songs'- by Amadi E.

3.1 Excerpt of the Poem on the First Day

Impetigo
Honey crusts of this impossible pet,
Impetigo let go of me
Let go of me, impetigo
I won't pet you impetigo

3.2 Excerpts of Poems Used on the Second Day

First poem

Lichen planus
Likes the planet
Likes plain us
Likes the plain ones
Like the leeches implant
Linear lichen
Polygonal planus
It doesn't pain us
The sight scares us

Second poem

So sorry!
Like limpets on limbs
Symmetrical silvery scales
On scalp, sacrum and skin
Pruritic, painful, pustules, patches and
Plaques, placed on palms and plantars
I feel so sorry for psoriasis

This study is a classroom observational study carried out by the instructor while teaching fifth year medical students dermatology. The analysis was done using simple arithmetic calculations using TECNO CAMON 16 calculator application. A table was used to represent proportions of response by the students. The students were asked to fill an assessment form of the dermatology lectures they received at the end of the posting which included assessing if the lectures were enjoyed. This assessment was done four days later, after the observational study was carried out. The posting lasted for 10 working days.

4. RESULTS

The students in attendance on that day of the lecture were 83.3% (40 out of 48 students). The students were aged within 20-27 years with females constituting 62.5% (25) of the participants. During the reading of the poems, the students were noted to be excited and giggled as they had their class mates read out the poems. A voice vote assumed 100% response. The attention as viewed by the tutor was that of 100% as all the students were awake and alert, with heads up throughout the time of the lecture. The body language was assessed by visual observation; the attention

Table 1. Analysis of demographics and responses

Description	Percentage(number)
Male	37.5%(15)
Female	62.5%(25)
Voice vote	≈ 100% (40)
Hand count by raise of hands (positive response- Enjoyed the lecture with poems)	75% (30)
Hand count by raise of hands (Did not enjoy the lecture with poems)	25% (10)
End of Posting Assessment form: Categorically stated that they enjoyed and understood the lecture because of the poems	2.5%(1)
End of Posting Assessment form (Did not categorically state that they enjoyed and understood the lecture because of the poems)	97.5% (39)

given by the students and their facial expressions showed that about 80% were smiling , laughing or giggling s the poems were being read out. Majority, 75 % (30 out of 40 students) present, raised their hands in affirmative that they enjoyed the class. On further inquiry two responses were taken from those who did not enjoy the poetry session during the lecture. The reasons were – one student did not feel that poetry was relevant to the exams; the other student did not fully understand the poems. On the lectures assessment form one student (2.5%) 1 of 40 respondents, stated specifically the use of poetry made the lectures enjoyable and aided his understanding.

5. DISCUSSION

This study showed that the use of poetry in teaching dermatology was found enjoyable by majority of medical students. It provoked giggles and laughter as it is known to have such characteristics. [3,4] Although this was contrary to another study done by Shapiro et al.[5] This could be due to the difference in methodology as Shapiro assessed mask making and comics alongside poetry. Poetry is increasingly been used in medical teachings to stimulate physicians and other health workers to describe their work experience and even to teach students.[1] Sharing experiences is known to increase one’s knowledge. In other to enhance the use of poetry as an educational tool amongst medical students and other health trainees, students are being encouraged to also pick elective courses in the field of literature, reflect on existing art work or a poet’s work on any medical theme, write their own feelings about a work and get others to criticize it. [4] Limitations also exist when using poetry as a tool for medical education as this study shows. The major limitation is the ambiguity that results from multiple complex meanings which can arise from the diction of

poet. [2, 6] The inculcation of poetry into the curriculum of medical teaching does not require any formal method; tutors, teachers and lecturers are encouraged to bring in a bit of poetry.[4] The use of poetry in teaching dermatology can be further enhanced by applying research poetics which involves transcribing spoken words of patients and clients into verses [7]. This can be modified and used in translating dermatology texts into a language that is easily understood by the students.

6. CONCLUSION

Poetry can be enjoyed by medical students. It can be a used as a teaching aid in dermatology.

7. LIMITATION

This study is an observational one carried out in the classroom by the instructor which is subject to bias. This is the first study done of its kind and there are no previous guidelines to follow.

GLOSSARY TERMS

Dermatology: The part of medicine and surgery concerned with taking care of skin problems

Education: The systematic order in receiving knowledge from an organised institution

Medical: Relating to medicine

Medicine: The science of detecting, treating and preventing diseases

Poetry: The branch of literature which is characterized by meter form (verses), rhythm and other figures of speech

Student: A person who has chosen to give their time to acquiring knowledge in a particular field.

PRACTICE POINTS

1. Medical educators in dermatology can bring in poems using the lay man's language
2. The aim of writing medical poems is to stimulate interest in a difficult topic.
3. Students are also encouraged to write poems on a dermatology lecture they enjoyed most.
4. Students are also encouraged to write poems on a dermatology lecture they understood most.
5. There could be comparison of experiences of the topics they understood most or enjoyed most and that which they enjoyed least or understood least.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

The contributor is a dermatology lecturer at Rivers State University. She is also the immediate past president of Seaview Poetry Club.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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