

# EMERGING TRENDS IN HEALTH HUMANITIES: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF MEDICINE AND ARTS

## Abstract

The field of Health Humanities has gained significant recognition and importance over the years as a multidisciplinary approach to healthcare. It encompasses the integration of arts, literature, ethics, and social sciences into medical practice and education. This research paper aims to explore the future trends in Health Humanities, focusing on the evolving role of arts-based interventions, narrative medicine, technology advancements, and the changing healthcare landscape. By examining these emerging trends, we can anticipate the potential impact of Health Humanities on patient care, medical education, and overall healthcare outcomes.

**Keywords:** Health Humanities, Multidisciplinary, Medicine, Arts, Literature.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The poem springs from the half-spoken words of such patients as the physician sees from day to day.... This, in the end, comes perhaps to be the occupation of the physician after a lifetime of careful listening.

— William Carlos Williams, Poet & Physician

In August 2017, Belgium, in collaboration with UNESCO hosted the ‘World Humanities Conference’ in which it highlighted its participation in all the other academic and professional domains like IT, Commerce and Medicine. The impact of humanities has also been extensively discussed in healthcare disciplines. It emerged in late 90’s and established itself as a “mature discipline” by the second decade of 21st century.

Classically, humanities included philosophical issues like ethics and moral attitude but recently it has expanded itself to literary, visual and performing arts, broadening the scope of clinical empathy and extended clinical experiences calling itself health humanities. Health humanities is an interdisciplinary field that incorporates elements of the arts and humanities to approach healthcare, health, and well-being. It involves applying creative arts (such as visual arts, music, and performing arts) and humanities disciplines (including literary studies, languages, law, history, philosophy, religion, etc.) to explore questions related to human health and well-being. While the application of the humanities to health is not a new concept, the specific framework of health humanities emerged in the early 21st century. The roots of health humanities can be traced back to other multidisciplinary fields such as medical humanities and expressive therapies/creative arts therapies. Health humanities utilize interdisciplinary research to delve into the experiences of health and illness, often focusing on subjective, hidden, or invisible aspects of these experiences. The field's interdisciplinary nature brings about diversity and encourages innovative ways of understanding and exploring health-related phenomena.

In the field of health humanities, the concept of health and its promotion is understood through the lens of constructivist principles inherent in the humanities, rather than the positivist approach of scientific inquiry. The health humanities embrace a dialogical perspective, which acknowledges the diverse and negotiated voices that contribute to multiple truths about health, in contrast to a linear perspective that emphasizes a single authoritative truth. Consequently, the evidence that informs health practices in the health humanities is generally rooted in meanings, values, and aesthetics (axiological), rather than purely factual knowledge (epistemological). It is important to note that the health humanities do not seek to replace the health sciences but rather provide an alternative paradigm and practical approach to understanding and promoting health. They can function in a complementary manner alongside the health sciences, offering a different perspective that enriches our understanding of health and its promotion. A leading proponent of Health Humanities Sir Kenneth Calman asserts in his paper “Literature in the Education of the Doctor” published in *The Lancet* “an educated doctor – that is, someone who not only has the requisite clinical skills, knowledge and experience but also can appreciate each patient as an individual human being with thoughts and feelings and can understand and help explain illness and suffering” (Calman 7)

## II. VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDICINE

Emerging research emphasizes the significant role of various art forms, such as literature, performing arts, visual arts, architecture, and design, in greatly improving the healthcare experience. The 21st century healthcare paradigm is shifting away from a purely medical model focused on disease protocols and curing, and moving towards a more comprehensive approach that encompasses the well-being of the whole person. This shift aims to sustain a high quality of life throughout treatments and effectively manage ongoing care. To support this new humanistic model of healthcare, an integrated healing approach is required.

The arts have an innate ability to nurture and provide solace to individuals during challenging times at any stage of life. Additionally, they can create environments that promote healing and rejuvenation for both patients and caregivers. As a result, the arts are now presented with unprecedented opportunities to play a vital role in this progressive healthcare model. By incorporating artistic elements, healthcare can be enriched, and the overall well-being of patients and caregivers can be significantly improved.

In his book titled *From Artist to Artist-in-Residence: Preparing Artists to Work in Pediatric Settings* (2008), Rollins made the case that reintroducing the "arts" into the field of medicine can assist children and their families in coping with the challenges of illness and the healthcare setting. Additionally, in an article titled "The Effect of Music-Reinforced Nonnutritive Sucking on Feeding Rate of Premature Infants," J. Standley demonstrated that music has been proven to enhance feeding rates among premature infants and alleviate their pain during painful procedures.

Music, which has a direct emotional impact on us, possesses a rich blend of drama and storytelling. Even without lyrics, it has the ability to provide a glimpse into lives marked by both joy and sorrow, vividly portrayed through the artistic elements of music such as its color, depth, and emotional resonance. Robert Schumann's compositions, in particular, seem pertinent in this regard, as they feature contrasting shifts between melancholic sonatas and exuberant symphonies. His music effectively captures the various aspects of a life overshadowed by the ups and downs of manic-depressive illness.

Arts-based interventions, including visual arts, music, dance, and creative writing, have shown promise in various healthcare settings. This section explores the future trends in arts-based interventions, such as the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) in therapeutic contexts, the integration of arts into clinical practice, and the potential for creative expression to improve patient outcomes

## III. LITERATURE AND MEDICINE

The association between literature and medicine is a rich and multifaceted relationship that has been observed throughout history. Both fields share a common goal: to understand and explore the human experience. Literature provides a unique lens through which medical practitioners can gain insight into the complexities of illness, suffering, and the human condition. Houston and colleagues (2011) in their article "Culturally Appropriate Storytelling to Improve Blood Pressure: A Randomized Trial" discussed the increasing

presence of arts in medicine programs, such as journaling, storytelling, and poetry writing, within healthcare systems for both patients and staff. They highlighted the innate human desire to share stories as a way of passing down experiential wisdom from one generation to another. Patients, particularly those with serious illnesses or nearing the end of life, often feel the need to express their experiences and life lessons to find peace, cope with loss, and celebrate their accomplishments and joys. Among plays, Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* (1947) movingly presents these aspects as the readers follow the main character's struggle during his social decline and personal dissolution with a growing recognition of his false moral values, his loss of family, and eventually his own life.

Journaling and storytelling are accessible and applicable in various healthcare settings. The act of storytelling does not necessarily rely on factual information, as Basting noted in her work *Forget Memory* (2009). She explained that engaging in creative activities and using imagination can bring satisfaction and promote better communication between patients and healthcare staff. The authors provided examples of literary art that transcends cultural traditions and generations, allowing vulnerable populations to share their stories both orally and through mediums like social media.

In medical education, literature plays a significant role in cultivating empathy and understanding among healthcare providers. Reading works of fiction and non-fiction that explore medical themes or feature medical protagonists can deepen their understanding of the human experience and enhance their ability to relate to patients on a deeper level. Literature offers valuable insights into the nuances of illness, the ethical dilemmas faced by healthcare professionals, and the complexities of the doctor-patient relationship.

Moreover, literature serves as a medium for reflection and self-exploration for medical practitioners. It provides a space for physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals to engage in dialogue about their own experiences, challenges, and moral dilemmas. By examining literary works, healthcare providers can gain new perspectives, question their assumptions, and develop a broader understanding of the social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of healthcare.

This interaction has given rise to a developing branch of medicine called narrative medicine. Narrative medicine emphasizes the importance of storytelling and narrative techniques in medical practice. By considering patients' personal narratives, healthcare professionals can develop a deeper understanding of their experiences, values, and needs. This section discusses the future trends in narrative medicine, including the incorporation of digital storytelling platforms, the use of artificial intelligence for narrative analysis, and the potential integration of narrative medicine into electronic health records.

The association between literature and medicine extends beyond the realm of clinical practice. Medical humanities programs, which integrate literature and other humanities disciplines into medical education, have gained prominence in recent years. These programs aim to foster well-rounded, compassionate, and culturally sensitive healthcare professionals who appreciate the complexities of the human experience.

It can be said that the association between literature and medicine provides a bridge between the scientific and humanistic aspects of healthcare. It enriches medical practice,

education, and personal growth by deepening understanding, promoting empathy, and encouraging critical reflection. The integration of literature into medicine allows for a holistic approach that recognizes the profound impact of illness on individuals and communities.

#### **IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ARTS AND MEDICINE**

The impact of arts on healthcare extends beyond personal experiences and storytelling to include the transformation of physical environments. Previous studies have explored the intricate nature of healthcare settings, where patient, family, and staff safety and respect are of utmost importance. It is evident that incorporating the arts into healthcare environments should align with the preferences of the community and prioritize artistic excellence when considering the design of public and private spaces. Through rotating exhibitions and art installations, the presence and content of artworks contribute to maintaining a connection with the local community and normalizing the healthcare experience. By offering a diversion from the often sterile clinical environment, the arts serve as a reminder of life beyond the stresses of medical treatments. Establishing art collections within medical centers represents one of the few remaining remnants of the once vibrant world of corporate collecting.

Integrating landscape elements within healthcare facilities, both indoors (atriums and waiting areas) and outdoors (rooftops and courtyards), has proven effective in enhancing the environments for patients and staff, providing spaces for contemplation and spiritual renewal. The authors advocate for involving artists and arts organizations during the early stages of healthcare facility design whenever possible. This ensures the inclusion of spaces and accommodations that are conducive to housing galleries and permanent collections, as well as facilitating participatory art activities in public and private clinical areas.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

The healthcare landscape is constantly evolving, influenced by factors such as cultural shifts, policy changes, and patient preferences. This paper explores how Health Humanities can adapt to and shape the changing healthcare environment, including interdisciplinary collaborations, community engagement initiatives, and the integration of social determinants of health into arts-based interventions. The future of Health Humanities holds tremendous potential for advancing healthcare practice and education. By embracing arts-based interventions, narrative medicine, technological advancements, and adapting to the changing healthcare landscape, Health Humanities can contribute to a more patient-centered and holistic approach to healthcare. This research paper highlights the importance of recognizing and investing in the future trends of Health Humanities to ensure its continued growth and impact.

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