

How do you treat a UNIQUE MASTERPIECE?

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I am honored and privileged to have been asked to write about my experiences and views for the *Stimulus* journal. My first encounter with Medical Humanity and Bioethics was about three years ago. I was enjoying a cup of coffee with my neighbor and good friend Dr. Dan Cavanagh (Interim Dean of College Liberal Arts, University of Texas Arlington). We were enjoying a deep conversation about Rumi, a world-renowned Sufi poet of Iran, and Dr. Cavanagh proposed that I share my views in a group discussion with the Medical Humanity group at UTA. Truly believing in the value of this program and what it could bring to healthcare providers, I gladly accepted. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a zoom conference with over 150 students and other professionals reaffirmed the importance and the need for this program once more. I have been asked to speak and return to UTA as a guest speaker on numerous occasions and I must say I am glad to see the program growing and finding its way back to healthcare. In the past, healthcare schools used to consider and accept students based on only their GPA and entrance exam, and I am glad to see that they are considering other important qualifications as the criteria before acceptance now.

I was asked about my career journey, and I will attend to that! My educational journey in the United States started when my parents migrated to the United States in 1983. I was in 6th grade and was placed in 9th grade due to my math and science skills. However, the language barrier and English being my second language was a big challenge. I have always been passionate about helping others and loved to work and create, so I decided to pursue a career in healthcare and chose the field of dentistry. I attended the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio and graduated from dental school in 1998. I opened my practice immediately after graduation. It was a successful business and rapidly grew into multiple dental offices. With a healthy income and everything a successful person would desire, I was not happy. I officially retired from dentistry in April 2010. One might wonder why I quit dentistry. After all, I had just turned 40 years old and was operating a successful chain of dental practices. Professor Sadegh Angha said that “The Wise are those who attract benefits and repel losses.”

I felt that...

... I was not practicing the Art of Dentistry as I originally imagined it.

... my humanistic values were not being addressed through my practice.

... my skills and treatment plans for patients were dictated by insurance and the cost of treatment, rather than the needs of the patients.

... my personal relationship with patients was at a minimum.

... completing an abundant number of forms and documents that had nothing to do with patient care was extremely exhausting.

... my initial intention, a mission to help others, was not being addressed by the ways I had to navigate the healthcare system as a provider.

Witnessing human suffering, trying to provide quality patient-centered care, long hours, uncertainty, and diminishing true values is enough to make any healthcare provider morally injured.

When Dr. Cavanagh ask me to present how poetry impacted my life, I must admit what really impact my life is Irfan (Sufism). The word “Irfan” literally means discernment and cognition. I have been attending the school of Islamic Sufism since I was a teenager.¹ Sufism is a discipline, a system of education that facilitates the journey of self-knowledge, a journey that enables the individual to discover his or her stable reality. The essence of poetry is Irfan (Sufism), often very condensed but with a wealth of knowledge equipped with an innate art of expression and wisdom. The words of the Wise and Gnostics that come in poetry, are about you, me, and all of us discovering the secrets of our true capabilities and healing potentials. These principles have withstood the test of time and truly provide a firm foundation upon which to build one’s life. It is about transforming our fears, hopes, and desires into wellness and wholeness. It is dealing with love and oneness and living in harmony with everything around us (Existence).

Sufism says that before we humans can truly communicate, find peace, understand nature, promote human rights, or have accurate psychology, we must come to discover a hidden dimension within ourselves. This faculty, this receptor enables us to cognize accurately our true situation. On any level of human interaction, harmony is necessary if communication is to be established. It takes harmony between the listener and speaker so that communication may take place. The fewer mental distractions the listener has, the more focused he is, and the more he is capable of understanding what the speaker is saying.² Sufism com-

pletes humanity's education. It answers ultimate questions about who you are, where you come from, and where you are going. It unchains you from your cave and allows you to recognize the reality underlying all of existence and to learn how to use wisely the riches already bestowed on you by existence. A Sufi analogy says the banquet is already before humanity, but we simply do not experience it because we are looking the wrong way. Whatever existence has, you also have. All that exists is imbued with existence, nothing is apart from existence.³

This is usually not something professional schools teach. Healthcare and practicing medicine require that extra attention (concentration) to capture all that the patient is telling you; that is, to say both verbal and nonverbal and realize that you too are communicating with the patient both verbally and nonverbally. When diagnosing and formulating a treatment plan, every bit of information matters. The success of the treatment plan is very much directly related to the doctor–patient relationship.

As a lead senior dentist, I had the opportunity to train numerous associates and auxiliary staff. One of the most important attributes I relayed to the clinical and non-clinical staff was to treat each patient with respect, dignity, and empathy as if they were working with a family member. I truly believed that each member of the medical team plays a significant role in the success and outcome of the patient's treatment. A positive and uplifting encounter with positive energy increases the patient's hope. Since each patient is unique, their treatment is unique as well even if they suffer from the same illness. Today, I would like to relay to my colleagues to treat their patients as a UNIQUE MASTERPIECE.



**“The smallest profit which an understanding between
Irfan and science
can give humanity is the discovery of
the truth of life.”**

***The Mystery of Humanity*
Professor Sadegh Angha**



**Saadi Of Shiraz
Major Persian Poet and
Pose Writer of the
Medieval Times.**

**All human beings
are members of one frame,
Since all, at first, from
the same essence came.**

**When time afflicts
a limb with pain
the other limbs at rest cannot remain.
If thou feel not for the other's misery
the human being is no name for thee."**

Interpretation by Secretary General of the United Nations
Ban Ki Moon, Tehran (Iran) 30 August 2012



Bibliography

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- [5] Edward B. Eastwick (Trans). *The Gulistan; or, Rose-Garden, of Shekh Muslihu'd-din Sadi of Shiraz*. Steven Austin, Hertford, 1852, p. 38.