

Infinite Ability: The Confluence of Disability and Medical Humanities

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ABSTRACT

In June 2011, Infinite Ability, a new special interest group on disability within the Medical Humanities Group was formed to explore disability through creativity. Disability studies are sporadically used in Medical Humanities program. Since persons with disabilities constitute a large minority, we need to bridge the gap so as to move towards social model of disability. The author describe an innovation of reaching people with disabled attitude through medical humanities and believes further research can help in incorporating new evidences towards achieving new special interest group on disability and initial activities in sensitizing people

Keywords: Disability, Disability through Creativity, Disabled Attitude, Medical Education, Medical Humanities

BACKGROUND

Deobrah Kirklin defines Medical Humanities (MH) as “an interdisciplinary and an increasingly international endeavor that draws on the creative and intellectual strengths of diverse disciplines including literature, art, creative writing, drama, film, music, philosophy, ethical decision making, anthropology, and history in pursuit of medical educational goals” (Kirklin, 2009). The study of disability is underrepresented in MH programs despite persons with disabilities (PwD) are a large minority which seeks medical care (Garden, 2010a; Garden, 2010b).

Article 1 of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines PwD as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in the society on an equal basis with others. The list of disabilities include autism spectrum disorders, blindness, cerebral palsy, chronic neurological conditions, deaf-blindness, dwarfism, hemophilia, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, leprosy-cured, locomotor disability, mental illness, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, specific learning disabilities, speech impairment and thalassemia.

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Medical Humanities is common in western medical schools but in South East Asia only Nepal and now India reports innovations in this field (Gupta, Singh & Kotru, 2011). Our Medical Humanities Group (MHG) was first ever such initiative in India (Gupta & Singh, 2011). Literature mostly reports use of narratives, paintings and lectures as tools of MH programs and use of disability studies is sporadic. To address the need, we developed a special interest group on disability (Infinite Ability) within MHG to educate students and faculty about disability studies as an integral part of MH (Figure 1).

The difficulties faced by disabled individuals have been recognized and the sharing of the experiences may serve as a supportive tool for others. Infinite Ability group is an attempt to provide an insight into the experience of living and coping with impairment while exploring disability through creativity.

INNOVATION

The setting for the innovation was a prominent medical school in a tertiary care hospital in New Delhi, India. The disability special interest group was named Infinite Ability after the founder Dr Satendra Singh's poetry got published in *BMJ Medical Humanities* (Singh, 2011).

The main purpose behind the formation of the group was the promotion and coordination

among medical PwD of medical humanitarian approaches that would focus on four competency-based learning objectives of narrative medicine: graphic medicine; interpersonal and communication skills; patient care, and professionalism (Singh, 2012).

Upon initiation, we faced the challenge of scarcity of medical PwD's and hence the group objectives were broadened to include other MH perspective. This inclusion helped in organizing us the first ever 'Theatre of the Oppressed' workshop for medical students in India (Singh, Khosla & Sridhar, 2012). A dedicated website was followed with 'reflections' from the PwD's as well as other MH perspectives. We invited Mrs. Madhu Sharma, who is completely visually impaired, to speak during our medical humanities lecture series, *Confluence* and she spoke on the topic 'Broadening Horizons: Looking beyond disability'. In her interactive talk she discussed many myths associated with disability and helped the audience in developing a wider view of ability and disability. *Confluence* was followed by an open invitation to contribute narratives on International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

This year the group partnered with Partho Bhowmick's Beyond Sight Foundation and organized a 'Blind with Camera' workshop in an attempt to empower the partially and completely visually impaired students of Delhi University (Chaudhary, Times of India, 2012). The mis-

Figure 1. Logo of infinite ability



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