

Humanism through the Lens of the Academic Pediatric Association

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A YEAR AGO today, I remember with vivid clarity standing before you as the Academic Pediatric Association (APA) President Elect while I moderated the Presidential Plenary session. I was quite nervous, hadn't slept well the previous evening, but a quote by Eleanor Roosevelt kept coming into my mind. "Do something that terrifies you each day." That sentiment certainly fit the bill for me that day.

I appreciate certain aspects of this quote, which stress the importance of trying new things, extending outside your comfort zone, exposing yourself to new adventures and seeing challenges as opportunities. This past year as President of the APA has been an amazing journey, and this journey has exposed me to new experiences and allowed me to meet an incredible number of new and interesting people. So I thank you for allowing me this opportunity.

My additional disclaimer is that I have been mentored, influenced and inspired by so many members of the APA and many of you in the audience.

The objectives of this presentation are to:

- define humanism and differentiate this concept from professionalism;
- demonstrate examples of humanism within the 4 pillars of the APA mission; and
- learn ways to address your own humanistic qualities through promoting individual well-being and self-care for yourself and your colleagues.

WHAT DOES HUMANISM REALLY MEAN?

I find some people tune out when they hear the word humanism and interpret this word as "just being nice." But there is more depth and substance behind this concept that I plan to share with you today. There are several definitions of humanism, but the following 2 demonstrate both the variability and common themes. The first was proposed by Edward Pellegrino, a well-known ethicist, who stated that humanism is "[A] set of deep-seated convictions about one's obligations to others, especially those in need. Encompassing a spirit of sincere concern for the centrality of human values in every aspect of professional activity."¹

The second definition was proposed by Susan Block. She states that humanism is "[T]he attitudes and actions that demonstrate interest in and respect for patients that addresses the patient's concerns and values. These generally are related to patients' psychological, social and spiritual domains."²

Going back in time to another Presidential Plenary session, I remember sitting in the audience and hearing Lucy Osborn given her Armstrong lecture, entitled "The Power of One" (Lucy Osborne, personal communication). With my training as a Robert Wood Johnson general academic pediatric fellow and my research experiences, I had been taught to rely on evidence-based medicine, to develop public health interventions that affect populations, and to strive for large sample sizes. Dr. Osborne's talk reminded me to look closer. Although having an effect on large populations is a noble goal, it is equally important to know the individuals who compose these populations. As we look at a crowd of people, it is important to look at the individuals who comprise the crowd and ponder what are an individual's characteristics and perspectives that make him or her unique as a human being. I found that seeking the individual differences and developing those relationships bring the greatest joy and meaning in my work; that is, to focus on humanism.

Humanism has been a cornerstone within medicine since the very beginning of its history. First described by Hippocrates in 400 BC, his concepts continue on in the Hippocratic oath, where the physician's duty is to benefit the sick and keep them from harm and injustice.³

In 1902, Sir William Osler emphasized the concept of humanism with his quote, "It is more important to know what kind of person has a disease than what kind of disease a person has."⁴

In 1927 Francis Peabody published "The Care of the Patient" in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. He emphasized that medicine is not a trade to be learned but a profession to be entered. The art of medicine and the science of medicine are not antagonistic but complementary to each other.⁵

In 1983 a subcommittee of the American Board of Internal Medicine wrote a position paper on the evaluation of humanistic qualities in the internist.⁶ In their pivotal statement, this subcommittee emphasized that essential humanistic qualities would be required of their candidates, that a major responsibility of resident training includes an emphasis on these qualities, and that methods of assessment were needed to advance the evaluation of these attributes in candidates of internal medicine.

Currently, the Arnold Gold Foundation has a presence at many of your medical schools and emphasizes the importance of humanism within medical education and practice.^{7,8} Some examples include acknowledging individuals who demonstrate humanistic qualities and the power of traditions, such as the white coat ceremony, to demonstrate the importance of maintaining humanism within the field of medicine.

I was surprised that there hasn't been much written on humanism from a pediatric perspective, nor a policy statement from pediatric organizations. I believe policy statements are important because they set expectations and also serve as a compass to guide the direction of a discipline or an organization. I found the lack of a pediatric policy statement surprising because Osler envisioned pediatricians as political beings who are involved in social policy and Dr. Halpern in his book, *American Pediatrics*, noted that the conceptual roots of pediatrics lie in health-related social problems.⁹

When I spoke with members of the American Board of Pediatrics and proposed the importance of a pediatric policy statement, it was mentioned that humanism is included under the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education competency of professionalism.¹⁰ Although this is true, I see them as distinct and believe there is a need to focus specifically on humanism. The author, Jordan Cohen, in his paper in *Academic Medicine*, makes a distinction between professionalism and humanism. He discusses that professionalism is a way of *acting* that includes observable behaviors that meet the expectations of patients. Examples of professionalism include competence, honesty, maintaining patient confidentiality, and responsibility for patients. Humanism is a way of *being* that comprises a set of deep-seated convictions about obligations to others, in particular helping others in need. Examples of humanism include altruism, integrity, compassion, and respect for others and for the human condition. In summary, Cohen states that “[H]umanism is the passion that animates professionalism.”¹¹

One mechanism by which to promote humanism in medicine is to integrate the humanities into professional training. Although some clinicians may have had exposure during their premedical studies, others may not have had such opportunities. The humanities allow a dialogue between health care providers and their patients by instilling a feeling for the human condition, tapping into our humanistic perspectives and understanding aspects of everyday life, and crossing boundaries of health care hierarchies to help us to better understand our patients.¹² The discussion of the humanities, whether it is through art, liter-

ature, film, or music, allows the sharing of differing perspectives and allows a community to scrutinize its own values and meanings.¹³

Osler was an advocate of incorporating the humanities into medical training. He made a practice of reading nonmedical literature for 30 minutes before bed each night and felt that “The wider and freer a man’s general education, the better a practitioner he is likely to be.” This broader education allows health care professionals to better understand the human condition and to include aspects of philosophy and ethics within our medical practice.¹⁴

EXAMPLES OF HUMANISM WITHIN THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE APA

Let us now explore humanism within the core foundation of the APA. The mission of the APA is to improve the health of all children and adolescents through leadership within these 4 pillars:

- education of child health professionals;
- research and dissemination of knowledge;
- patient care; and
- advocacy in partnership with children, families, and communities.

As we celebrate the end of the APA’s 50-year anniversary, I have reflected both on the amazing role models who were the early leaders within the APA and how humanism was at the core of their contributions. Although there are countless examples, I would like to acknowledge a few examples of the early leaders.

I will pair examples of the humanities through art work or literature to introduce each of the 4 pillars of the APA.

HUMANISM IN MEDICAL EDUCATION

This painting by Robert Hinkley from 1882 (Fig. 1) depicts the first demonstration of surgical anesthesia use at a major institution. Although this painting is present on the cover of many medical education textbooks, I don’t feel it depicts the patient in a very humanistic manner. At first glance I thought the one physician is holding the patient’s hand, yet on closer inspection you can see he is monitoring the pulse. We have come a long way in medical education in ensuring that we respect and address the needs of patients within our educational mission.

One of our early APA leaders, Dr. Evan Charney, was pivotal in developing resident education in primary care.¹⁵ During the 1970s, residency training was focused on hospital-based patients, with little attention to aspects of prevention, chronic disease, or the joys and satisfaction of general pediatric ambulatory practice. Dr. Charney emphasized the importance of the social aspects of medicine, legitimized primary care medicine, and identified the best ways to ensure that residents received the training they needed. He demonstrated humanism at the level of our trainees and to our patients.

Within education, I must also mention 2 very beloved APA colleagues, Richard Sarkin and Steve Miller, who were role models for humanism and served as scholars for the Gold Foundation. Their premature deaths in a plane crash remain an important reason for us to continue to pursue humanism as part of their legacy.

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