

The Art and the Science of Healing

Victor Grech, Charles Savona Ventura, Joseph M Cacciottolo

The human condition cannot be compartmentalized into separate and convenient facets. The individual, as well as the society he/she lives in, is a complex conglomeration of experiences that transcend all aspects of life. We are what we are because of the way we are made up and because of the experiences we are subject to throughout our lives – a combination of nature and nurture. The Medical Humanities (MH) is an interdisciplinary field of medicine which attempts to personalise medical care, allowing the medical practitioner to apply patient management within the broad canvas that makes up the individual. MH includes all aspects of the humanities (such literature, philosophy, ethics, history and religion), the social sciences (such anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, and geography) and the arts themselves (including literature, theatre, film, and visual arts), and the application of all of these to medical education and medical practice.¹ MH is mainly concerned with training medical practitioners: “to cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always”.¹

The Humanities, Medicine and Sciences Programme (HUMS) was set up and formally recognised and endorsed by the Senate of the University of Malta, and inaugurated by the then Rector of the University, Professor Juanito Camilleri on 27 January 2012. HUMS seeks to encourage university staff to explore the interfaces between the humanities and medical science, and aims to facilitate and disseminate cross-disciplinary research. The need to develop this structure was felt as scholars of the humanities, social sciences and the arts have always been interested in matters pertaining to health and illness, as both are crucial to the very core of human experience. On the other hand, doctors and scientists very often also look upon their work as a service that improves and enriches the human experience in the knowledge that the cultural experiences are an essential and integral part of medical management of the individual. Indeed, university graduates in the not too distant past boasted of a broad grounding which included a common trunk of knowledge in the sciences and humanities, such that the medical curriculum included study units that addressed the relevant aspects of the humanities. This is not always possible within the modern educational process since the medical knowledge base has become so vast.

The Centre for the Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) in the University of Malta coordinates and administers the University's Programme in the Liberal Arts and Sciences (PLAS). PLAS enables students to follow ‘stand alone’ units from a broad array of subjects in the arts and sciences. PLAS also allows students to use accumulated units to achieve a Certificate, a Diploma, a Higher Diploma and a Bachelor’s degree in Liberal Studies, without any temporal constraints.

HUMS helps to run the PLAS Module entitled “The Art and the Science of Healing” (LAS2025). This is a four ECTS stand-alone study unit that will next run in second semester of the academic year 2018/2019. All of the lecturers are doctors with a particular interest in one or more aspects of the humanities (table 1). The aim of the course is to

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Editorial

widen the horizons by disseminating cross-disciplinary fertilization. HUMS and CLAS encourage prospective colleagues not only to attend, but also to inform any potentially interested

individuals about this module which comprises a short but incisive interdisciplinary foray.

Table 1: The Art and the Science of Healing (LAS2025)

Speaker	Title
J Cacciottolo	Health and illness as social concepts Landmarks in the history of medicine 1
J Cacciottolo	Landmarks in the history of medicine 2
C Savona-Ventura	Key points in Maltese medical history 1
C Savona-Ventura	Key points in Maltese medical history 2
C Savona-Ventura	The body image
J Cacciottolo	The face in medicine, art and technology
A Manché	The discovery of the circulation
A Manché	Hearts and egos: cardiology and cardiac surgery
V Grech	Doctors and Science fiction
C Mallia	Art and medicine 1
C Mallia	Art and medicine 2
J Cacciottolo	The breast in art, medicine and politics
J Cacciottolo	The concept and evolution of medical education
C Savona-Ventura	Medical education in Malta

* All lectures are held weekly between 18.00-20.00.

References

1. Gordon J. Medical humanities: to cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 2005 Jan 3;182(1):5-8.

Cover Picture:

'Queen Elizabeth's Valletta'

Oil on board

By Victor Grech

The High Commissioner in London HE Norman Hamilton relinquished his duties on 31 July 2018. As is customary, he was called upon by the Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps, HE Alistair Harrison (Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps) who presented him with a gift from Her Majesty The Queen. To reciprocate, the High Commissioner presented the Marshal with a gift for Her Majesty, a painting by consultant paediatrician Prof. Victor Grech.