

The Review

Exhibition review

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

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Should we as GPs be inviting our patients to discuss end-of-life care at a milestone birthday, because they are entering a relevant phase of life; in much the same way as we are encouraged to discuss sexual health with teenagers? Has death replaced sex as the taboo subject?

Unless we die suddenly, we are likely to undergo an episode of ill health, frailty, and dependence in the run-up. For those that cannot face this loss of personal power, the knowledge that they can end their life if they wish to may provide sufficient reassurance (according to the *Newsnight* programme, only a fraction of patients who register with Dignitas have gone through with it). A society confident in its care for those dying naturally, could also be confident in allowing the few who wanted to be instrumental in their own end to do so. Until the debate moves from either/or to both/and, recognising that different people have different needs, we are likely to continue with the anxiety and suffering of the dying who do not feel that their country can provide the care they need.

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DOI: 10.3399/bjgp12X625247

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LEONARDO DA VINCI: PAINTER AT THE COURT OF MILAN

National Gallery,

9 November 2011–5 February 2012

The exhibition *Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan* fully booked at the National Gallery, reveals how much Leonardo believed in the importance of sight in the workings of the human mind.

In cross sections, the exhibition shows how the eye is attached to three ventricles, or chambers, in the brain. The first chamber gathers data, the middle one contains the *senso comune* (common sense) which processes data and houses the human soul, imagination and intellect. The third chamber stores memories. We can see diagrams of the head as if Leonardo had conducted an anatomical dissection but we know these largely depended on received opinion and his own imagination.

At the same time he sets out the measurements for the ideal proportions of the human head and intended his anatomical studies to form part of a treatise

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)

The Virgin of the Rocks, 1483 – about 1485

Oil on wood transferred to canvas. 199 x 122 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Peintures (777)



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which he later hoped to write. Gazing at these two simple sketches your eyes are opened to the notes in the artist's characteristic left-handed mirror writing which refer to the layers of the scalp and are compared to an onion.

The most shocking emotion I experienced at the exhibition was when I entered room 4 and could see simultaneously for the first and the last time in my life both the paintings of the divine *The Virgin of the Rocks* (on loan from The Louvre and housed at The National Gallery): together they are outstanding and every other painting in the room and the crowd itself ... seem like nothing in comparison.

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DOI: 10.3399/bjgp12X625256

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)

The Virgin of the Rocks, about 1491/2–99 and 1506–8

Oil on poplar, thinned and cradled. 189.5 x 120 cm



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