There has been increasing commentary about the humanities in medical education. There have also been frequent calls for more emphasis on the humanities in medical education. The reasons for these calls will be familiar to those who read the medical education literature: broadly they include concerns about the increasingly technical nature of medicine and medical education, and the need for doctors to learn how to explore knowledge from a perspective that is different to that of the traditional scientific approach. However this increased interest and these calls are not new.

In 1947 Medvei wrote a descriptive manuscript in St Bartholomew’s Hospital Journal outlining his experience in learning from the humanities. His insightful manuscript was written from his perspective as a physician working in St Bartholomew’s Hospital.

The manuscript starts with the author describing his high school and medical school education that led to his career as a doctor. However, despite satisfaction from his medical career, he describes there being something missing in his general knowledge. He felt neither rounded nor balanced in his knowledge. He eventually found balance and fulfilment through studying philosophy. He found most fulfilment by eventually reading and sometimes rediscovering the Greek philosophers. He claims his reading was ‘haphazard’ and knowledge ‘irregular’ but with time he began to start to gain more enjoyment from both life and work as a result of his study. The author then continues by describing what he feels the role of the humanities should be in medical education and in medicine more generally.

At this stage of the manuscript, it becomes surprising at the extent to which the author begins to mention problems that seem to be remarkably modern. He feels that medicine has become too mechanised and specialised, something he appears never to have existed in the first place. Nor will we dispel this sense of unease from the manuscript. There is a sense of unease in medicine and in medical education that exists today and that existed many years ago. According to Platt:

‘... we profess to despise technology though we see it all around us. ’

Complaints about the overuse of technology in medical education are nothing new. They have been around for almost 80 years. Surely it is time to look elsewhere.

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