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Letters to the Editor

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be disinterested in the whole exercise. Secondly, it takes time to go through a novel selecting relevant sections to be used. This doubles the time one would usually take to prepare a didactic lecture. Compared with using other non-traditional teaching methods such as popular movies, an entire DVD or VHS tape has to be watched to grasp all lessons to be learnt (Farre *et al.*, 2004). However, with novels it is relatively easy and quick to flip pages in order to concentrate on relevant sections only.

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Patient crying in hospitals: a survey on undergraduate nursing and medical students

Dear Sir

Crying can be elicited by many kinds of suffering, ranging from physical pain to loss; from failure, disappointment, and discouragement to anger and guilt feelings (Micelli & Castelfranchi, 2003). The behaviour of crying is a frequent situation in hospitals, which comprise one of the places where individuals can cry comfortably. Students who spend a long time with patients and patients' relatives and who have an intensive and long experience in hospitals do frequently encounter crying individuals.

In this study, we wished to identify the reasons for and meanings of patient crying and the kind of approach medical and nursing students developed to it. A total of 130 students participated in the study, 90 students from the Faculty of Medicine and 40 students from the School of Nursing in their last year at the University of Akdeniz. The study data are available, together with the self-report questionnaire prepared by the researchers.

The mean age of the medical students was 23.4 years and the mean age of nursing students was 21.5. Only 8.9% of the medical students stated that they had received training on crying; 95% of nursing students received training on this topic. It has been determined that during their clinical practice period, 77.8% of medical students and 87.5% of nursing students had encountered a crying patient. Students stated that helplessness, fear, invasive procedures and sorrow, boredom, loneliness, losing a loved one and being in the hospital were the main reasons for patient crying.

Both groups of students stated that they used non-therapeutic techniques such as asking detailed questions about the reason for crying, neglecting the crying patient and giving advice. It should be noted that none of the nursing students said they tried to stop the patient crying and that only 5.7% of medical students cried with the patient, while this ratio was much higher (22.8%) for nursing students.

According to these results, a strong awareness needs to be created among medical and nursing students to be able to deal with the crying patient. Such awareness can be generated by adequate emphasis on these issues in the curriculum. Educators should take this concept into account when discussing healthcare providers' curriculum.

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Micelli, M. & Castelfranchi, C. (2003) Crying: discussing its basic reasons and uses, *New Ideas in Psychology*, 21, pp. 247–273.

Benefits and drawbacks of implementation of PBL elements into a new course on applied pharmacotherapy

Dear Sir

In 2002, the University of Zagreb Medical School initiated a reform of medical education aiming at the development of an enhanced teaching and learning capacity. The reform pivoted around the introduction of three problem-based learning (PBL) courses (Diseases of the Musculoskeletal System, Emergency Medicine and Rational Pharmacotherapy) to a total of 229 twelfth semester students. Rational Pharmacotherapy, a 4-week PBL course, consisted of 12 tutorials which were carried out three times a week along with traditional lectures (20), seminars (13), exercises (12), meetings with experts (4) and pro and contra debates (3). Under tutor supervision groups of up to 10 students had to solve a total of 4 weekly PBL cases closely related to practical pharmacological problems. Two multiple-choice tests were included. In order to complete the course students had to pass the second test. Comparison of the two test scores of a representative student sample group ($n = 42$) showed a significant increase in the levels of the students' factual knowledge. All elements of the course were evaluated by the students who filled in a detailed questionnaire comprising of 34 questions on the quality of the whole course and its teaching formats. Students gave ratings on a 7-point Likert scale ranging form 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly