

Ethics and human values

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In ancient times, education in ethics and human values was reinforced through the art of storytelling.¹ Storytelling represents a solution to the educational problem caused by the fact that most individuals, especially young people such as medical students and residents, have only been exposed to a limited range of life experience. Storytelling, whether it be through theater, literature, opera or cinema, has the capacity to supplement young learners' understanding of ethics and human values by exposing them to people and situations they have not yet encountered.

Engaging learners emotionally and promoting reflection in them are other essential elements in promoting a meaningful discussion of values and ethics.² In our experience, cinema, arguably our most popular current medium for storytelling, provides an outstanding resource in this regard.

The importance of values and ethics in medical education is clear. Given the ever-emerging technologies that preoccupy medical learners, there is a compelling need to reinforce, inspire and educate future healthcare professionals about the human dimension of their work. Otherwise our students and residents run the risk of becoming mechanics rather than healthcare providers. Issues of values and ethics are central to any attempt to foster humanism in medical learners.

In his use of cinemeducation to teach humanism to medical students, Dr Blasco makes comments while the movie clips are showing.^{3,4} Because students are involved in their own reflective process, they may at times disagree with the teacher's comments and reach their own conclusions. Talking during a film clip may work best with films that have subtitles.

The film clips suggested in this chapter are also useful when attempting to inspire and motivate young learners. Part of their power lies in the fact that they do not deal directly with medicine.

Vocation for doctoring

◆ *The Bone Collector* (Denzel Washington, Angelina Jolie). This film tells the story of Lincoln Rhyme (Denzel Washington), a seasoned homicide investigator who, because of a tragic accident that incapacitates him, must team up with a young rookie, Amelia Donaghy (Angelina Jolie), in order to hunt a serial killer.

a (0:59:44–1:02:15). In this scene, Rhyme attempts to persuade Amelia not to give up on her dream of being a detective.

- 1 What gifts do you bring to medicine?
- 2 How can you best develop these gifts?

3 Have you ever thought about leaving medicine? If so, why? What caused you to stay?

◆ *Patch Adams* (Robin Williams). This is a movie about Dr Hunter ‘Patch’ Adams and his experiences during medical school. Despite the emphasis on objectivity in medical culture, Patch tries to bring warmth and healing to his interactions with patients, challenging the status quo by interacting with patients in unconventional ways.

a (0:32:26–0:35:18). In this scene, Patch disrupts his medical school study group by asking provocative questions about medicine.

- 1 What do you remember about your decision to become a physician?
- 2 Why *do* you want to be a doctor? Have your motivations changed over the years?
- 3 What memories (good or bad) of medical school are evoked by this clip?

Keeping your idealism

◆ *Tucker: the Man and his Dream* (Jeff Bridges, Joan Allen, Martin Landau). This movie is based on the real life of Preston Tucker (Jeff Bridges), who built and attempted to market a sleek new automobile in 1948. It is a film about the American dream and the power of corporations to successfully defeat competition.

a (01:43:20–01:44:20). In this scene, we witness Tucker’s adaptive response to being acquitted by a jury but still denied the right to build any more of his automobiles. Despite only having been able to build 50 cars before being stopped by the Big Three automobile manufacturers, Tucker still feels victorious.

- 1 What level of idealism do you bring to medicine?
- 2 What have been the challenges to maintaining your idealism?
- 3 Have you been able to maintain your idealism? If not, what has replaced it?

◆ *October Sky* (Jake Gyllenhaal, Chris Cooper, Laura Dern). Set in the 1950s, this film tells the story of a group of boys from a coal-mining town who become fascinated with rocketry and space exploration, despite the reservations of their parents. The movie centers on how this particular conflict plays out between Homer (Jake Gyllenhaal) and his coal-mining father (Chris Cooper).

a (01:17:31–01:20:30, 01:35:14–01:39:50). In these scenes, Homer differentiates himself psychologically from his father. Despite his father’s admonitions, Homer refuses to go back to coal mining and clings to his dream of building a rocket.

- 1 What types of family challenge have you faced in making your own dreams come true?
- 2 How can you help your patients to persevere in the face of multiple challenges?

Facing difficulties

◆ *The Truman Show* (Jim Carrey, Ed Harris, Laura Linney). This movie is about 'reality television' before it became such a mainstay of our culture. Truman (Jim Carrey) is an ordinary man whose every move is televised and broadcast to the nation without his knowledge.

a (01:24:07–01:29:03). In this scene, the director of the Truman Show (Ed Harris) attempts to drown Truman in front of a live audience by capsizing his boat. Truman, who now realizes that his life is being televised, attempts to sail to freedom by tying himself to the mast of his boat, and miraculously survives.

- 1 What does this scene teach you about perseverance?
- 2 What difficulties have you overcome in your life?
- 3 Have there been times in your medical career when you felt like giving up? What helped you to survive?

Understanding suffering and pain

◆ *Shadowlands* (Anthony Hopkins, Debra Winger). This movie tells the true story of CS Lewis (Anthony Hopkins), an acclaimed author and professor, and his relationship with Joy Gresham (Debra Winger), a spirited divorcee from New York. During the course of their relationship, Lewis confronts the joy and pain of loving deeply.

a (0:10:17–0:11:58). CS Lewis addresses a church congregation about the topic of suffering.

- 1 What is CS Lewis's perspective on the role of suffering in life? What is your perspective?
- 2 How have you been able to cope with the suffering that you observe as a healthcare professional? What has been the most difficult clinical case for you in this regard? What made this particular case so difficult?
- 3 How have you been able to help patients and their families to cope with the pain and suffering that result from medical conditions?

b (01:45:50–01:48:11). In this scene, Joy Gresham and CS Lewis have an intimate discussion about Joy's impending death from Ewing's sarcoma, a type of bone cancer.

- 1 What is Gresham's philosophy of suffering? How does her philosophy correspond to your own?
- 2 What lessons do you take from this scene?
- 3 Why is it so hard for people to talk about death? In what ways can you facilitate such discussions within families?

◆ *The Spitfire Grill* (Ellen Burstyn, Marcia Gay Harden, Will Patton, Alison Elliot). This is a movie about redemption in a young woman who relocates to Gilead, Maine, after being in prison for the past five years.

a (01:31:36–01:35:05). In this scene, Percy Talbot (Alison Elliot) tells her story of a previous rape and subsequent miscarriage to a friend. Percy's friend listens

quietly to her story and then places her hand on Percy's shoulder without saying a word.

- 1 Why does listening in and of itself help to reduce suffering?
- 2 How can you be a better listener in the midst of a busy practice?
- 3 What are the best ways to encourage patients to talk about difficult aspects of their life?

Transcendence

◆ *Marvin's Room* (Meryl Streep, Leonardo DiCaprio, Diane Keaton, Robert De Niro, Hume Cronyn). This powerful family drama tells the story of two sisters, independent Lee (Meryl Streep) and kind-hearted Bessie (Diane Keaton), who are taking care of their chronically ill father, Marvin (Hume Cronyn).

a (01:26:53–01:28:02). In this emotional scene, Bessie, who has leukemia and is searching for a bone-marrow donor, tells Lee how grateful she is that she has been able to care for their father. She deeply affects her more cynical sister by directly stating her feelings about selflessness.

- 1 How does the act of service to others allow us to transcend mortal limits?
- 2 How are you able to demonstrate 'love' in your clinical work?

◆ *Dead Man Walking* (Susan Sarandon, Sean Penn). This movie tells the story of the close involvement of a nun, Sister Helen (Susan Sarandon), with a convicted murderer, Matthew (Sean Penn), who is awaiting execution.

a (1:36:00–1:37:30). In these scenes, Sister Helen is ministering to Matthew before his imminent execution.

- 1 What do these scenes tell us about the transformative power of love?
- 2 How do you understand the common occurrence of 'jail-house conversions'?

References

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2. Retegui AR. *Pulchrum*. Madrid: Rialp, 1999.
3. Blasco PG. *Medicina de Família e Cinema: recursos humanísticos na Educação Médica*. São Paulo: Casa do Psicólogo, 2002.
4. Blasco PG. Literature and movies for medical students. *Fam Med* 2001; 33: 426–8.