

# Analysis of the Role of Humanities Education Courses in Improving Medical Students' Doctor-Patient Communication Skills

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**Abstract:** With the continuous development of the medical industry, the harmonious and stable doctor-patient relationship has become a focus of social concern. As the core force of the future medical team, medical students' doctor-patient communication skills directly affect the direction of the doctor-patient relationship. As an important carrier for cultivating medical students' humanistic qualities, humanities education courses play an irreplaceable role in improving their doctor-patient communication skills.

**Keywords:** Humanities education courses; Medical students; Doctor-patient communication; Function analysis

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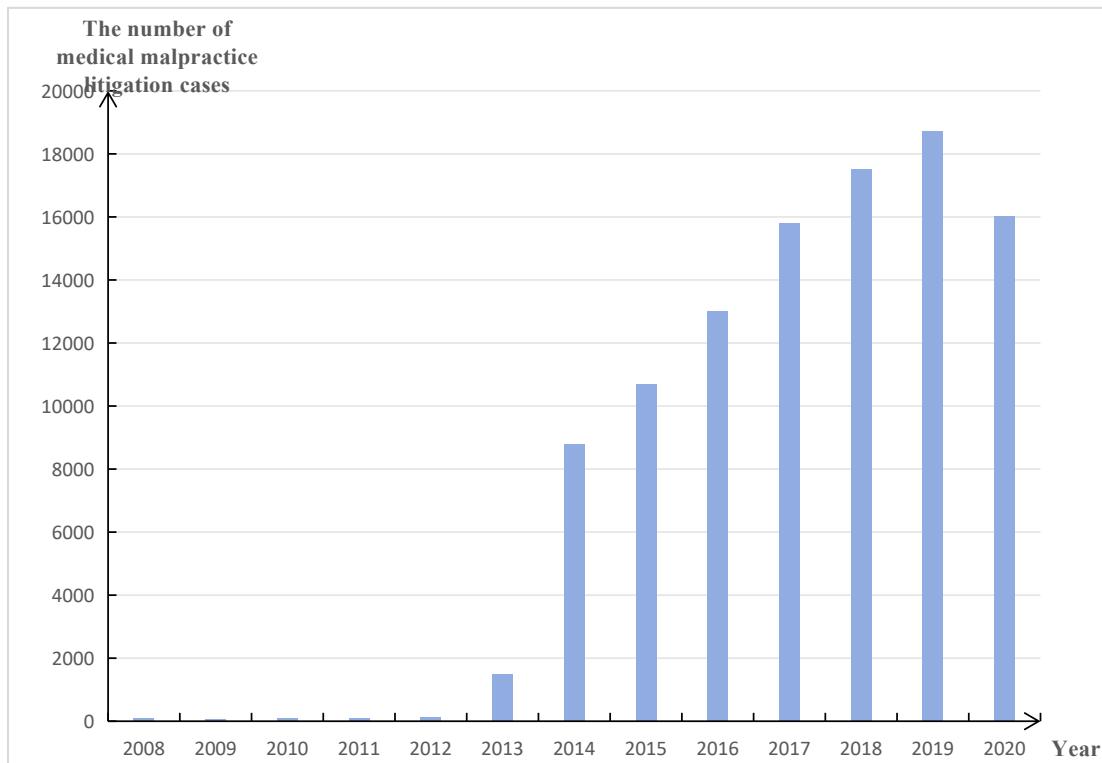
## 1. Introduction

Modern medicine has shifted from purely technical treatment to an overall medical model centered on the overall health of patients. This transformation has placed higher demands on the qualities of medical students. In recent years, the issue of doctor-patient relationships has become a hot topic. The relationship between doctors and patients has become increasingly tense, and the conflicts between doctors and patients have become more intense<sup>[1]</sup>. Good communication and interaction skills between doctors and patients are one of the essential core skills for medical students and medical staff. This article first elaborates on the relevant concepts and importance of doctor-patient relationship and medical humanities education, analyzes the current status of medical humanities education, deeply explores the correlation between medical humanities education and doctor-patient relationship, and finally from the perspectives of educational institutions and individual medical staff, proposes the necessity and specific measures for strengthening medical humanities education, aiming to provide theoretical references for improving the communication skills of medical students and building harmonious doctor-patient relationships.

## 2. Doctor-patient relationship and medical humanities education

### 2.1. The importance of establishing a good doctor-patient relationship

It is well known that a good doctor-patient relationship is the foundation for the smooth conduct of medical activities, and it is of great significance to the treatment effect of patients, the improvement of medical quality, and the sustainable development of the medical industry. However, incidents of doctor-patient conflicts occur from time to time, which not only seriously disrupt the normal medical order but also directly affect medical quality and safety. According to literature statistics, in recent years, medical disputes and conflicts caused by the crisis of trust between doctors and patients have shown a significant upward trend, with a growth rate of 15%. What is worrying is that approximately 66% of medical staff have personally experienced conflicts and disputes between doctors and patients, and more than 30% of medical staff have been subjected to violence from patients and their families <sup>[2]</sup>. Many patients believe that it is difficult and expensive to seek medical treatment, and they have to wait in long queues. Some doctors, in order to make profits, prescribe many unnecessary drugs to patients, thereby reducing the trust between doctors and patients and triggering many doctor-patient conflict incidents <sup>[3]</sup>. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health, there were 12,797 medical dispute incidents in 2018, and the number increased sharply to 19,178 in 2019, with an increase of over 70,000 incidents within a short period. On average, each hospital would have 27 medical dispute incidents per year <sup>[4]</sup>. The number of medical malpractice litigation cases in China has increased from less than 100 in 2011 to over 15,000 in 2019 (see **Figure 1**), thus causing medical institutions and medical staff to face higher risks of medical accident liability <sup>[5]</sup>. Currently, doctor-patient conflicts occur frequently, not only affecting the medical order but also damaging the image of the medical industry. However, a good doctor-patient relationship can reduce the occurrence of conflicts, promote society's understanding and trust of the medical industry, and maintain social harmony and stability.



**Figure 1.** The number of medical malpractice lawsuit cases from 2008 to 2020 <sup>[5]</sup>

## **2.2. The definition and background of medical humanities education**

Medical humanities education refers to the systematic integration of humanities disciplines such as philosophy, ethics, sociology, literature, and art into medical professional teaching, aiming to cultivate medical students' humanistic qualities, professional ethics, and communication skills. Since the 1990s, higher medical colleges in China have gradually incorporated humanities education into the teaching reform agenda, forming the concept of "two wings of medical humanities," that is, while conducting scientific and technological education, humanistic quality cultivation is also carried out simultaneously<sup>[6]</sup>.

Equal emphasis on humanities education and clinical technical education is an important direction for current medical education reform. According to the survey data from relevant literature, nearly 80% of patients and their families believe that the medical staff's humanistic care has a significant positive impact on their treatment experience<sup>[7-10]</sup>. This indicates that the importance of medical humanities education for the doctor-patient relationship cannot be ignored. However, current medical students still have deficiencies in humanistic quality education. Relevant research data show that many medical colleges urgently need to strengthen and improve the setting of humanities education courses, the allocation of teaching resources, and teaching methods<sup>[11,12]</sup>. Under such circumstances, medical humanities education has gradually gained attention and has become an indispensable part of the medical education system.

## **3. The correlation between medical humanities education and the doctor-patient relationship**

### **3.1. The positive impact of medical humanities education on improving the doctor-patient relationship**

Medical humanities education can fundamentally improve the doctor-patient relationship by cultivating the humanistic qualities of medical students; secondly, it can enhance the communication skills of medical students; and it can strengthen their sense of professional ethics. Research shows that after medical staff receive education centered on humanistic care, they show greater concern for the needs and feelings of patients during interactions with them<sup>[13]</sup>. There is also a significant improvement in their attitudes and understanding towards patients. After interns receive humanities courses, patient satisfaction rates increase from 97% to 100%, and all indicators of communication skills show statistically significant improvements<sup>[14]</sup>. Similarly, a mixed-method humanities teaching experiment for cardiovascular internal medicine residents shows that the medical communication ability of students in the experimental group is significantly higher than that of the control group, and their clinical assessment scores also improve simultaneously<sup>[15]</sup>. Therefore, strengthening medical humanities education is indispensable. It can directly improve the doctor-patient relationship, enhance medical quality, and provide patients with more comprehensive and personalized medical services.

### **3.2. The role of medical humanities education in promoting clinical practice**

Medical humanities education not only has a positive impact on improving the doctor-patient relationship but also effectively promotes the improvement of medical students' clinical practice abilities. During the clinical diagnosis process, good communication skills are crucial for medical students to obtain accurate medical history information. Through the communication skills cultivated through humanities education, medical students can have deeper communication with patients, guide patients to accurately describe important information such as the patient's condition, onset time, and past medical history, thereby providing a reliable basis for doctors to make accurate diagnoses. If medical students lack communication skills and are unable to communicate

effectively with patients, they may miss key information about the patient's condition, leading to diagnostic errors. In conclusion, medical humanities education plays an important role in promoting clinical practice, helping to enhance the clinical abilities of medical staff, improving the doctor-patient relationship, and improving medical quality.

## **4. Discussion on the necessity and measures of strengthening medical humanities education**

### **4.1. Strengthening medical humanities education from the perspective of educational institutions**

Educational institutions, as the main implementers of medical humanities education, should fully recognize the significance of medical humanities education and take effective measures to improve the quality of education. In terms of curriculum system reform, the status of medical humanities courses should be enhanced, their proportion increased, and they should be designated as compulsory courses, ensuring sufficient class hours. At the same time, the course content should be optimized, a systematic and comprehensive curriculum system should be constructed, covering fields such as philosophy, ethics, law, psychology, communication, etc., and closely integrated with clinical practice, with increased content of case-based teaching, allowing medical students to enhance their communication skills and humanistic qualities through actual case analysis. In terms of teaching method innovation, the traditional single lecture mode should be changed, and diverse teaching methods should be adopted, such as introducing scenario simulation teaching methods and setting different doctor-patient communication scenarios. In terms of teacher team building, the cultivation and introduction of medical humanities education teachers should be strengthened. In terms of assessment and evaluation systems, a scientific and reasonable medical humanities education assessment mechanism should be established. Strengthening medical humanities education is an important part of educational institutions in cultivating medical professionals.

### **4.2. Strengthening medical humanistic qualities from the perspective of individual medical professionals**

As recipients and practitioners of medical humanities education, individual medical staff should actively enhance their humanistic qualities and communication skills with patients. In the interaction of doctor-patient relationships, patients are undoubtedly in a relatively disadvantaged position. They not only have to endure physical pain but also face psychological anxiety and unease. They have an extremely urgent need for the care, assistance, and understanding from medical staff. This means that the doctor-patient relationship in medical activities is not merely a technical service relationship. When only the display of medical technology and the pursuit of treatment results are emphasized, while ignoring the emotional experience of patients, it is very likely to trigger doctor-patient conflicts. From a fundamental perspective, only when medical staff learn to put themselves in others' shoes, fully understand the physical and mental feelings of patients, and their demands and misfortunes, and always hold a heart of kindness, can a harmonious doctor-patient interaction foundation be established<sup>[16]</sup>. In practice, lessons should be summarized, and communication methods should be continuously improved.

For individual medical professionals, taking the initiative to assume the responsibility of enhancing their own humanistic qualities is an inevitable requirement for coping with challenges in clinical practice. In daily medical treatment, medical staff often encounter complex scenarios such as emotional counseling, ethical decision-making, and crisis management, all of which cannot be achieved without a solid humanistic spirit as support. Studies have shown that about 80% of doctor-patient disputes arise from poor communication

or emotional conflicts. Therefore, the humanistic quality of medical professionals is crucial for improving the doctor-patient relationship<sup>[17]</sup>. One should learn to listen to patients' demands, respect patients' wishes, communicate with them in a gentle and friendly manner, and avoid using harsh and technical terms, so that they can easily understand the relevant information. Medical staff need to master scientific psychological counseling methods. When patients and their families are facing difficulties caused by the disease, they should provide timely and effective psychological comfort and support to alleviate their negative emotions. Therefore, conducting training on psychological support skills is also an indispensable part<sup>[18]</sup>.

At the practical level, medical staff can effectively implement the enhancement of humanistic qualities through various approaches. On one hand, they can actively participate in learning and training activities related to medical ethics, communication skills, psychological support, etc., and systematically acquire relevant knowledge and skills to lay a solid theoretical foundation for the improvement of humanistic qualities. On the other hand, in clinical practice, they can actively practice the humanistic concepts and convert the learned knowledge into practical actions for serving patients. Through continuous accumulation of experience and reflection and summary, they can deepen their understanding of humanistic qualities and enhance their application ability.

In conclusion, from the perspective of individual medical professionals, strengthening the cultivation of medical humanistic qualities is of extreme necessity and practical significance. Medical professionals should establish an awareness of continuous learning and achieve self-improvement through various means, such as participating in ethical discussions, communication training, and psychological support training. This individual-level enhancement of qualities not only promotes the professional growth of medical professionals themselves but also fundamentally improves the doctor-patient relationship and enhances the warmth and quality of medical services. At the same time, medical institutions should also play a supporting role by conducting targeted communication training to strengthen medical professionals' awareness of humanistic care, establishing a transparent and fair complaint handling mechanism to provide channels for patients' demands, and constructing a patient-centered medical environment. This will form a synergy with individual improvement, further enhancing patients' sense of participation and trust.

## 5. Conclusion

In a word, the humanities education courses play a crucial role in enhancing the communication skills of medical students with patients. They not only cultivate the students' humanistic qualities, improve the doctor-patient relationship, but also promote the improvement of their clinical practical abilities, laying a solid foundation for their future career development. Currently, while humanities education has made certain progress, there are still problems such as unreasonable course design, single teaching methods, and insufficient teaching staff. It requires the joint efforts of educational institutions and individual medical professionals to solve these issues.

In the future, with the continuous development and improvement of medical education, medical humanities education will undoubtedly receive greater attention and development. It will cultivate highly qualified medical personnel who possess both professional skills and humanistic care, providing strong talent support for achieving the grand goal of a healthy China.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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