

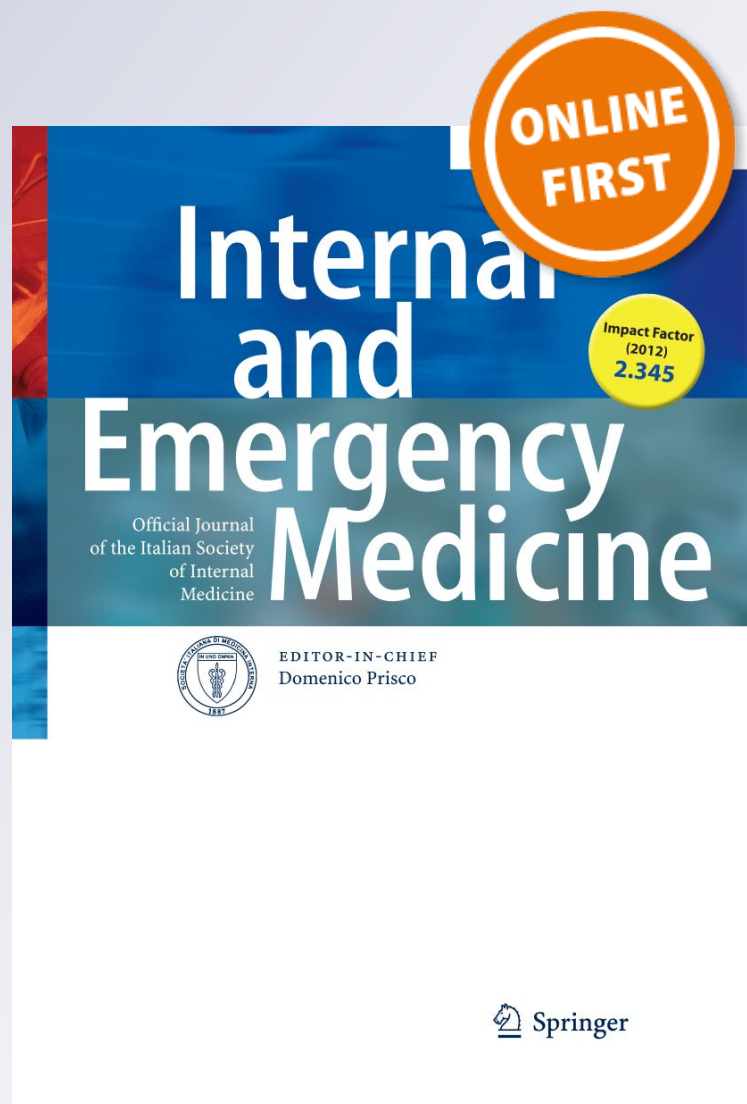
# *Why include humanities in medical studies: comment*

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## Why include humanities in medical studies: comment

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Dear Editor,

In their article, Why include the humanities in medical studies? [1], Boniolo, Campaner, and Coccheri give good reasons why medical students benefit from studying the humanities, specifically philosophy. Below are additional reasons to take their arguments even more seriously.

1. A study published in *The Lancet* shows that medical students who study the humanities do better in medical school than those who do not [2, 3].
2. Studying the humanities is correlated with lower rates of burnout among medical students [4]. In a world where between 19% and 76% of physicians report burnout, this reason alone suffices to introduce the study of medical humanities into medical school curricula.
3. For many types of ailments and patients, medicine requires the art of communication and empathy. Empathy, which has been shown to improve patient outcomes [5], requires understanding. Such understanding can be difficult if we have not actually experienced what the patient is experiencing. Philosophy and the humanities provide a window into the human condition which facilitates understanding of other humans—patients—even if we have not personally walked in their shoes.
4. Relatedly, for medicine to be person-centred, it requires empathy and understanding, for which the humanities and philosophy are helpful—or indeed required [6].
5. For some medical problems, philosophy is not only desirable but necessary. The problem of “too much medicine” (TMM) is a good illustration of this. A main cause of TMM is “disease mongering,” whereby diseases are all but invented. For example, it is normal to sometimes have trouble focusing on things sometimes. Yet there is now a name for its severe form: adult attention deficit

disorder, which can be treated by methamphetamines (speed). Philosophy, which includes investigating the nature of disease, can constrain the problem of too much medicine by providing guidelines for what can legitimately count as an ailment. In fact, in the absence of such philosophising, it is open season for anyone (often, but not always drug companies with financial conflicts of interest) to promote non-diseases to promote a ‘cure’.

6. No amount of studying the science of medicine can provide a guide to action, because all patient values and circumstances differ. Hence, the study of ethics cannot be ignored.
7. Feedback from many courses demonstrates that students love philosophy and the humanities. In a world where institutions of higher education are competing for the best students, this cannot be ignored. (See here, for example: <https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/history-and-philosophy-of-evidence-based-health-care>).

In short, studying philosophy and the medical humanities have many benefits and it is great to see that many medical schools are adopting these subjects as part of their core curricula.

### Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** I have no conflicts of interest relevant to this paper.

**Statement of human and animal rights** This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

**Informed consent** For this type of study formal consent is not required.

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