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Integrating medical humanity into dental education: An innovative approach using paleodontology and dental history



With great interest, I read the article by Cheng FC and Chiang CP showing a perspective on the prevalence of Buddha tooth relics from a dental point of view.¹ I agree with the suggestions of the authors that future research using paleodontology and other techniques to better understand the identity and characteristics of the relics is a nice contribution to the piece. I wanted to extend this viewpoint to dental education that integrates medical humanity.

Incorporating humanity into dental education is of significant importance in the nurturing of well-rounded dental professionals.² Previous studies have shown innovative pedagogical approaches in the teaching of "Oral Embryology and Histology", including the infusion of the arts into this course.^{3,4} Here, I demonstrated an innovative pedagogy in the group discussion in the class. The discussion sheet was crafted with the intriguing theme "Emperor Yang of Sui's Teeth," coupled with knowledge of the anatomy and histology of the tooth. The inspiration for devising this comprehensive group discussion topic stemmed from the discovery of two molar teeth during the excavation of Emperor Yang of Sui's tomb. The discussion sheet, presented on an A4 sheet, commences with a straightforward narrative elucidating the emperor's life, achievements, and the circumstances surrounding the unearthing of his tomb. The emperor's photograph and his teeth were showcased on the same sheet as points of reference. A PowerPoint version of these images was also prepared to facilitate a more extensive view during the discussion class, and these references can be easily accessed on the Internet. Another sheet included questions and space for students to work on. These questions explored aspects of dental morphology and an analysis of pathological features related to the appearance of these molars in oral pathology, together with possible causative factors. It was imperative to ensure that the knowledge to answer these questions was covered within the course curriculum, allowing students to have a solid conceptual foundation to tackle these inquiries. This thematic approach could also be

adapted for advanced students to formulate questions pertaining to the clinical practice, such as issues involving tooth sensitivity, periodontitis, etc. For instance, a sample question could be "If the Emperor sought your dental expertise, what might be the primary reason for his visit? Provide a detailed explanation." Clinically relevant questions bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-world scenarios. The final question could be about human dimension: "After learning about the emperor's life, portrait, and teeth, what thoughts and emotions do you experience?" This question served as a catalyst for students to engage in profound humanistic contemplation, enhanced their capacity for self-expression, and fostered an environment for sharing diverse perspectives on life.

Within the sphere of dental education, the integration of medical humanities and multidisciplinary approaches has become a crucial pedagogical avenue.⁵ By expanding the educational horizon and connecting the world of dental science with the depth of human experience, it not only enhances the students' capacity for critical thinking and practical application, but also promotes a deeper understanding of the human aspect of dentistry.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jds.2023.11.008>

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Received 13 November 2023
Final revision received 17 November 2023
Available online 25 November 2023