Enhancing Observational Skills
Learning to Look

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Lost in Clinical Translation

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Bedside is a series about health care from a nurse’s-eye view.

Tags:

Doctors, Hospitals, Language and Languages, Medicine and Health, Nursing and Nurses

A classic “Far Side” cartoon shows a man talking forcefully to his dog. The man says: “Okay, Ginger! I’ve had it! You stay out of the garbage!” But the dog hears only: “Blah blah Ginger blah blah blah blah blah blah blah Ginger ...”

As a nurse, I often worry that patients’ comprehension of doctors and nurses is equally limited — except what the patient hears from us is: “Blah blah blah Heart Attack blah blah blah Cancer.”

I first witnessed one of these lost-in-translation moments as a nursing student. My patient, a single woman, a flight attendant in her early 30s, had developed chest pain and severe shortness of breath during the final leg of a flight. She thought she was having a heart attack, but it turned out to be a pulmonary embolism: a blood clot in the lungs. Treatment required several days in the hospital. Already far from home and alone, she was very worried that a clotting problem would mean she could no longer fly.

When the medical team came to her room, they discussed her situation in detail: the problem itself, the necessary course of anti-coagulation treatment
Looking...

The art of diagnosis begins with seeing

“Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details.”
Sherlock Holmes

……Details, details, details
The Doctor
Luke Fildes
Mrs. Guthrie
Chatterton
Chatterton
Chatterton
Chatterton
Differential diagnosis

“Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing. It may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different”

Holmes
How the Brain Learns to Look

Marvin M. Chun, Yale University

Art Credit: Santtu Mustonen (NYT, 2013)

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Salvador Dali. Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire. 1940.
(Anderson & Winauwer, 2005, Nature)
Neuroscience supports Visual Literacy

- The brain is mostly visual
(Gogtay, ..., Thompson, 2004)
Neuroscience supports Visual Literacy

• The brain is mostly visual

• Visual experience is critical
Neuroscience supports Visual Literacy

- The brain is mostly visual
- Visual experience is critical
- The visual brain is modifiable
Action video gaming can expand useful field of view and increase visual sensitivity.
When searching for a particular object in a sea of shapes, people who played video games regularly showed less activation of the brain regions linked to attention, a sign that their brains were performing the task more efficiently.
The Inversion Effect
(Orientation specificity)
Neuroscience supports Visual Literacy

- The brain is mostly visual
- Visual experience is critical
- The visual brain is modifiable
- Art education is essential and effective
Use of fine art to enhance visual diagnostic skills

Dolev, Friedlaender, & Braverman (1999)

Henry Wallis. The Death of Chatterton. 1856.