

# Art and training in the healthcare area in Italy

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## BACKGROUND

Cognitive as well as personal and interpersonal skills are considered necessary in the medical and nursing fields. Many studies suggest the use of artistic practices and pedagogical methods such as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) for training in this context. Since 2014 in Italy, these practices have been introduced into the university curriculum, in the MCE training and the warm hospital with positive results in improving skills and limiting stress for healthcare workers.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The format of the lesson and activities in the different contexts was designed to provide images to share for discussion by the participants and to propose other useful artistic practices to improve observation, empathy and the relationship with the patient and his family, the interprofessional team and other life skills.

The Art and Medical Humanities Lab activities were introduced in the 3rd, 4th and 5th year of the medical curriculum (Ferrara, 2020) and nursing curriculum (Ferrara, 2018) at Sapienza University with VTS practices, Active Listening and Iconodiagnostic experiences, with works of art in the first lessons and ending with the use of clinical images in the last meeting. The activities are applied in L'Aquila University as experimental research, in warm hospital (Ferrara, 2023), in the Palliative care context and in the MCE for local health institute. In each experience, questionnaires were submitted and the qualitative and quantitative results were

evaluated with the validation grid for skills and personal burnout. (Ferrara, 2020a; Ferrara, 2022).

## RESULTS

The results of the application of the designed format are consistently positive. The VTS programme was effective in increasing the visual skills of the entire sample of students. The *VTSkill grid* also reported the positive impact of the VTS programme on the improvement of medical students' problem solving, language expression and critical thinking skills. In an application of the Art format in the nursing curriculum, the results of the impact study on skill improvement were successful and a parallel study analyzed the impact of VTS on stress and burnout, also showing positive results.

## DISCUSSION

The literature referring to the studies on the impact of the use of art in this field, and the results of the experience presented demonstrate an important effectiveness of the educational format designed with VTS method and other art practices; this is evident in both in promoting several abilities deemed professionally relevant like visual skills, problem solving, critical thinking, empathy, team building, resilience, and cultural sensitivity and a reduction in stress and burnout levels. The results of this experience show clear impact even from short exposure to this transversal learning method.

## CONCLUSION

Feedback on the effectiveness of the experience leads us to emphasize the need to maintain these activities in the academic curriculum and in the continuing education of the professional, to promote various skills considered professionally relevant such as visual skills, problem solving, critical thinking, empathy, team building, resilience and cultural sensitivity.

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