

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

2023: A Memorable Year, an Artistic Outlook

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Osteopathic medicine is recognized for training and parity with other medical fields that treat and take care of patients. And osteopathic medical schools continue to graduate accomplished physicians who use all aspects of their training to carefully consider the needs of their patients to treat them holistically.

In 2023, osteopathic medical students found graduate medical education homes in places sophisticated enough to recognize knowledgeable graduates with attributes that make a solid resident physician. Advocates for the osteopathic students' GME placements were impactful on federal and state levels. Accomplished faculty, staff, and leaders of osteopathic medical schools continue to teach all they've learned and, in this way, contribute to the profession.

As we reflect on those who've contributed to, and made a difference in, our educations, helping to create and shape our nuanced understanding of medicine, we have many to thank. One group who has contributed much to medical education is artists. Some physicians, in fact, are artists who branched out and used visual arts in ways both to depict and explain human anatomy. Take Dr. Alexander Gross, for instance: he was a surgeon whose artistic descriptions of surgical anatomy assisted physician education. And then there was Dr. Frank Netter, a surgeon whose anatomical illustrations can be found on nearly every medical student's PC to this very day. Considering the challenges from Leonardo DaVinci's time, where deep examination of the human body was not performed how it is today, DaVinci gave us comparative structures using a mix of human and animal anatomy, which were richly educational.

Throughout time, artists have helped medical students understand and appreciate the human body. Without art—without illustrations—a deeper understanding of the muscles, nerves, vessels, and other structures would not have been possible. Artists' power of observation helps them enhance and illuminate details that are difficult to notice when simply examining a patient.

Beyond what art can do to help us understand anatomy, it can also help us process emotions. Art fosters self-expression and can guide us to envisioning a hopeful future through positive imagery. Experiencing art through positive images helps students improve focus and transports us to a world beyond our imaginations. Art can raise serotonin levels, which helps with illnesses such as depression, and can lower cortisol levels with positive visual experiences, which can assist with healing after traumatic events.

Art is also used to help those with neurodegenerative diseases to stimulate pathways. Visual creativity can heal, treat stress, and rewire the brain. Studies show that artists aid in human creativity, and participate in modern neuroscience and neuroimaging by the sheer practice of observation. Pathways for specific functional organization of the brain are delineated. Neural circuits are malleable. The brain is capable of making new connections, activating new pathways, and unmasking secondary roads. Studies show that working with visual art can change neurotransmitter levels and stimulate the brain.

Additionally, the artist aids in understanding differences in cultures and families by showing us the very essence of life. We see depictions of pastoral scenes, families gathered, and communities at work. These are transmitted to us through painted scenes of real people—a visual history and an understanding of the culture that others experience. Without art there would be a lack of understanding of both the most simple and complex ideas.

Understanding the human body has been deeply enriched by our artists and we owe a great deal to their work and vision.