MEDICAL EDUCATION
Teaching Confidentiality through Comics at One Spanish Medical School
Artwork by Mónica Lalanda, MD, MSc, and caption by Mónica Lalanda, MD, MSc, Rogelio Altisent, MD, PhD, and Maria Teresa Delgado-Marroquín, MD, PhD

Abstract
At the University of Zaragoza in Spain we developed an innovative way to teach the concept of confidentiality to medical students, which we tested by comparing the use of customized comics with more traditional methods. We proved that using comics is more attractive to students than lectures and class discussions, that it increases class participation and students’ self-awareness of learning, and that it maintains the same academic results. We share our experience visually in a two-page comic.
It is a well-recognized fact that medical students suffer what has been called “ethical erosion” during their years in Medical School. Their sense of empathy and bedside manners deteriorates. The reasons are complex and multiple.

Students also demand teaching techniques that are better adapted and more entertaining. I found out about all this as I studied for my MSc in Medical Ethics. I was shocked!

If medical schools change people for the worse, we should do something about it. Shouldn’t we?

However, we have a problem.

I couldn’t stop reading graphic pathographies! A whole new world I didn’t even know existed!

Graphic novels about illnesses (as defined by Michael Green and Kimberly Morey)

Not only read comics, but also read about comics. Scott McCloud is a genius up.

It turns out to be an unusual genre and not just for kids.

*The invisible art*

In comics, we see boxes and we connect them and turn them into ideas. We get to understand things that aren’t really there. It’s quite magical. A sequence of only two images can contain a long story.

Understanding comics is innate to our brain.

A comic can be useful in medical education.

It promotes the development of diagnostic skills (after all, diagnosing is coming up with ideas where there are only clues, as you do when reading comics).

It humanizes illnesses, increasing empathy.

John, who lives with diabetes.

The invisible art

Understanding comics is innate to our brain.

A comic can be useful in medical education.

It promotes the development of diagnostic skills (after all, diagnosing is coming up with ideas where there are only clues, as you do when reading comics).
Figure 1. *Comics for Medical Education: A Spanish Experience*, by Mónica Lalanda, Rogelio Altisent, and Maria Teresa Delgado-Marroquín
Caption
Comics are increasingly used in medical schools as a tool for students to reflect on their own experience, increase their empathy towards patients, and improve their communication skills [1]. However, as far as we are aware, using customized comics to teach students specific content in health care ethics has not been attempted anywhere before. At the University of Zaragoza in Spain, we developed an innovative educational project: we created comics about confidentiality specifically for medical students and used them to teach preclinical students as part of their compulsory training. We’re now so convinced that comics should be used to teach even the most ethically complex concepts that we use a comic format to explain our experience to you as readers.

References

Mónica Lalanda, MD, MSc, is an emergency medicine physician in Spain and holds master of science degrees in medical ethics and bioethics. She is also a comic artist.

Rogelio Altisent, MD, PhD, is a general practitioner with the Research Group in Bioethics at the University of Zaragoza in Aragón, Spain. His professional interests include family medicine, bioethics, professionalism, education, teaching innovations, and clinical ethics committees.

Maria Teresa Delgado-Marroquín, MD, PhD, is an assistant professor of ethics at the University of Zaragoza Medical School in Aragón, Spain, where she also practices at Delicias Norte Health Center. She is trained as a bioethicist and general practitioner.

Related in the AMA Journal of Ethics
Go Home, Med Student: Comics as Visual Media for Students’ Traumatic Medical Education Experiences, February 2018
Roles of Graphic Pathographies in Clinical Training, February 2018
Smiles, Apologies, and Drawing Trauma-Informed Care in the PurpLE Clinic, January 2017
They Are People First, Then Patients, May 2017
The Use of Visual Arts as a Window to Diagnosing Medical Pathologies, August 2016

The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.

Copyright 2018 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.
ISSN 2376-6980