

10 Years with the Journal of Medicine and Movies

Richard F. Wagner, Jr.^{1,2}

¹The University of Texas Medical Branch Galveston, Texas 77555-0783 (USA).

²Edgar B. Smith Professor of Dermatology.

Correspondence: Richard F. Wagner. The University of Texas Medical Branch Galveston, Texas 77555 (USA).

e-mail: rfwagner@utmb.edu

Received 28 February 2014; accepted 6 March 2014.

By the mid-19th century, still photography was beginning to make inroads into medical education and starting to displace earlier and more subjective artistic depictions of disease that were used to teach physicians¹. Following the Lumiere brothers' invention of the cinematograph in 1895 and the rapid technical advancement in filmmaking that ensued, medical doctors quickly grasped the objectivity of moving pictures and used it effectively for educational purposes as well². Historically, early uses of medical movies were largely for training professionals and in efforts to promote public health². While movies are still employed for these purposes in our digital age, they are also gaining momentum in other aspects of medical education. Commercial studio productions initially created for mass entertainment are currently used to teach medical students and residents about psychosocial and cultural aspects related to clinical medicine and are welcomed as useful tools to approach a variety of important subjects³. This type of educational application has successfully been used in family medicine and psychiatry. Contemporary popular films have also recently been used to teach about skin diseases^{4,5}. However, unlike earlier use in medical education where realism was a priority, some current studio films featuring skin diseases are misleading, especially to nonmedical viewers. Although it may appear to be counterintuitive, the serious study of such movies not only encourages medical students to develop greater understanding about the skin diseases inaccurately depicted, but also enhances their ability to understand why media is portrays skin diseases in this light. In this essay, I share my recent educational experiences with film as a new approach to teach medical students about dermatology and media.

This innovative didactic approach for teaching medical students about dermatology and the impact of skin diseases on individuals and society has intellectually engaged my students and has resulted in original dermatology research that has been shared with international scholars through the Journal of Medicine and Movies (JMM). Last year, two of my students published comprehensive reviews about Kaposi's sarcoma and acne vulgaris as they are depicted in film^{6,7}. In this issue of JMM, my students have published another peer-reviewed manuscript about portrayals of orolabial herpes in movies⁸. Not only have these students mastered medical knowledge about the clinical diagnosis, pathophysiology, epidemiology and treatment of these skin diseases through their exposure to these related films, outside readings and class discussions, but they developed a critical eye toward media representations of skin diseases. They better understand the artistic purpose for filmmakers' inclusion of skin disease in their works, and the reasons why skin disease portrayals may be inaccurate. However, for some of my students, their medical education does not stop there. Through mentorship encouraging them to further develop their initial concepts about skin disease and by providing ongoing academic support to their effort, a complete manuscript finally emerges. Many of my students never previously explored the possibilities of medical publication, but they were eager to learn and their sophistication rapidly developed as they were guided through the process. There is little doubt that their written communication skills greatly improved as revisions were made and their polished work was formally submitted to JMM for peer-review. There were delighted when their paper was published and freely available on the

internet for the world to read and consider. Sadly, this type of higher education academic experience is currently achieved by relatively few medical students. I wish more medical students would have the opportunity to personally experience this type of early career success. Although peer-reviewed publication by medical students is still unusual, it certainly is a lofty educational goal for medical schools to actively encourage.

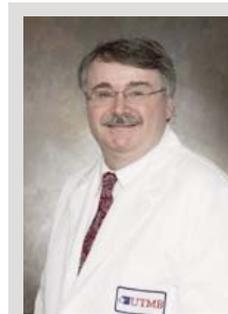
Despite initial progress in systematically analyzing movies and other broadcast media regarding their use of skin disease content and its potential impact on audiences, much more work in this area needs to be done in dermatology and in other areas of medicine. The medical community is beginning to grasp the enormous personal, social and economic cost of skin diseases⁹. Several other medical specialties have found commercial films to be highly inaccurate in portrayals of physicians. Movie psychiatrists frequently violate boundaries and are incompetent¹⁰. Plastic surgeons are likewise portrayed unrealistically in film¹¹. An American television situational comedy utilized satire more frequently for dermatology and psychiatry than for more highly regarded medical specialties¹². This unfortunate media approach on these subjects may have far reaching negative consequences for patients, their physicians, other providers, and healthcare. Public interest would be well served if organized medicine had the ability to timely respond to media inaccuracies about healthcare issues and make this information easily assessable and continuously updated and available. Such an objective, constructive response to erroneous medical constructs and misinformation could ultimately have a positive influence on filmmakers and other public sources of healthcare information, resulting in more socially responsible media representations. One exciting possibility would be for healthcare educators interested in learning more about the media messages to hold annual yearly meetings at different locations around the world to share experiences and ideas. Out of these meetings greater professional understanding about the intricate relationships media and health would emerge, and a comprehensive way to continue ongoing dialog could be developed. Academics in the field could share their newest research through poster and oral presentations. Invited international panels could explore controversial ideas in the field. Professional networking would develop. Recently released movies relating to medicine could be critiqued, and perhaps those attending would vote to recognize the best annual medical film. Filmmakers, broadcast and print media could be invited to attend the meeting and submit their current work for evaluation. In honor of JMM's valuable contributions to this field, I nominate Spain as the first meeting site!

Our professional experience with JMM at The University of Texas Medical Branch has been nothing

short of outstanding. The JMM editors and staff are highly skilled professionals who are experts in medical publication. My students are extremely grateful for an opportunity to share their scholarly work with an international audience with similar interests on the pages of JMM. I am hopeful that the outcome of this early exposure and professional recognition by the academic medical community will continue to inspire my students to continue these activities once they graduate from medical school. Through their experience with the publication process at JMM, they certainly have mastered the tools necessary for continued academic success.

References

1. Cinemeducation: a comprehensive guide to using film in medical education. Alexander M, Lenahan P, Pavlov A, eds. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing, 2005.
2. Bonah C, Laukotter A. Moving pictures and medicine in the first half of the 20th century: some notes on international historical developments and the potential of medical film research. *Gesnerus* 66 (2009) 121–146 http://www.gesnerus.ch/fileadmin/media/pdf/2009_1-2/121-146_Bonah.pdf
3. McFall KJ. A critical account of the history of medical photography in the United Kingdom. <http://www.migroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/A-critical-account-of-the-history-of-medical-photography-in-the-UK.pdf>
4. Wagner RF Jr. Teaching medical students dermatology through film. *J Med Mov* 2012; 8(1):30-34, <http://revistamedicinacine.usal.es/index.php/es/vol8/num1/682>
5. Wagner RF Jr. Novel to film adaptation analysis: a new educational approach to dermatology education. *J Med Mov* 2012;8(4):139-141. <http://revistamedicinacine.usal.es/index.php/en/vol8/num4/708>
6. Holliday AC, Wagner RF Jr. Kaposi's sarcoma in film. *J Med Mov* 2013; 9(3). <http://revistamedicinacine.usal.es/index.php/volumenes/volumen9/num3/748>
7. Subrt AP, Wagner RF Jr. Comparative depictions of acne vulgaris in movies and in animated television cartoons. *J Med Mov*, 2013;9(4):178-187. http://revistamedicinacine.usal.es/index.php/downloads/doc_view/528-vol9-num4-original4-en
8. Holliday AC, Salih A, Wagner RF Jr. Cold sore, cold soul? An examination of orolabial herpes in film. *J Med Mov* 2014;10(1):19-25, <http://revistamedicinacine.usal.es/index.php/volumenes/volumen10>
9. Current Problems in Dermatology. Itin P, Jemec G, eds. Volume 44. Dermatological Diseases and Cumulative Life Course Impairment. Linder MD, Kimball AB, eds. Karger (New York), 2013.
10. Gharaiabeh NM. The psychiatrist's image in commercially available American movies. *Acta Psychiatr Scand* 2005;111:316-319.
11. Hwang SJ, Park S, Hwang K. Global plastic surgeons images depicted in motion pictures. *J Craniofac Surg* 2013 Mar;24(2):e106-8. doi: 10.1097/SCS.0b013e31826468de.
12. Vickers JL, Uchida T, Wagner RF Jr. Television depictions about dermatology and skin diseases in Seinfeld. *Dermatology Online Journal* 2010;16 (12):1 http://dermatology.cdlib.org/1612/1_commentary/1_10-00322/vickers.html



Richard F. Wagner, Jr., MD is currently the Edgar B. Smith Professor of Dermatology at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas, USA. In addition to serving as the Program Director for the Dermatology Residency Program, he also teaches several didactic courses in the medical humanities to upper level medical students. These classes focus on analysis of literary and cinematic skin disease depictions and their impact.