Response to "The Dawn of Quantified Humanism"

In "The Dawn of Quantified Humanism,"[1] Peter Kahn, MD, considered the Humanism Assessment Tool (HAT), which is under development by The Arnold P. Gold Foundation and J3Personica. "To be sure, developing compassion and humanism is crucial," he wrote, and then argued that "the quantification of humanism by its very nature destroys that which it seeks to capture."[1(p549)]

We agree wholly with Dr Kahn on the importance of developing compassion and humanism, and we share his worry about reductionist quantification. At the same time, precisely because nurturing humanism is so crucial, we are eager to learn how to facilitate this process.

How do we best develop humanism in ourselves and in others? And, as we find techniques and methods to stretch ourselves in more humanistic directions, we will need a way to assess our growth in humanism. Humanism is a complicated construct with many variables and factors, and it is important to *measure what matters*.

How to measure what matters is not easy or obvious. The Gold Foundation, which focuses on humanism in health care, has spent 30 years in this essential territory, using recognition, ritual, research, and role-modeling methodologies. The HAT pilot study is a collaboration among 7 medical and nursing schools, the Gold Foundation, and J3Personica, a research-based organization focused on developing assessments in health care. Our approach for this pilot study was performed under Institutional Review Board approval or exemption from each of the schools. The HAT assessment is based on the classic domains of the I.E., C.A.R.E.S. humanism mnemonic developed by the Gold Foundation, and includes integrity, excellence, compassion, altruism, respect, resilience, and empathy. The purpose of this study is to collect data to pilot an assessment of humanistic values in clinical students, as defined by the Gold Foundation, and to determine this method's value and effectiveness. Specifically, we initiated this study to evaluate the quality of the individual assessment items, and to ensure that they are effectively measuring the humanistic concepts of interest.

The HAT assessment is being developed to provide participants with a self-assessment method to understand where their answers place them on a continuum of the I.E., C.A.R.E.S. traits in comparison to their peers. Each student's responses were aggregated with those of more than 700 medical and nursing students across the country to begin to assess basic item statistics as well as to conduct preliminary factor analysis and scale reliabilities. Using this critical assessment data from our first cohort, we will further refine the HAT assessment.

To be clear, our aim is to create a tool for self-reflection, one that is available confidentially and allows for insight into one's own humanistic nature. Self-awareness is well documented in the literature as foundational for emotional intelligence.[2] Like any behaviorally based self-assessment, the HAT assessment captures just a moment in time. Still, we believe self-assessment is worthy, and a tool for putting one's own behavior and thoughts into context can provide essential insights for human growth.

Our efforts and exploration are, in the end, centered on nurturing humanism. We welcome ideas and collaboration around how to develop and assess humanism in ourselves and in others, an aim that, we hope, ultimately creates more compassionate health care—and a more humanistic world—for all of us.

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References

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