

Prescription for medical students: A day at the art museum?

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With the growing number of people with Alzheimer's disease, understanding their care is vital for doctors. Yet medical students often just learn the facts and may only see people with advanced disease who are at the hospital or nursing home. A study shows a new way to help medical students learn about the disease—at the art museum.

For the study, which was published in the July 29, 2015, online issue of *Neurology*, the [medical journal](#) of the American Academy of Neurology, 19 medical students attended a 90-minute museum art program designed for people with dementia and their caregivers.

The students, many of whom had little experience with people with Alzheimer's, appreciated the experience. "It was very inspiring to see the way caregivers can work with their loved ones with dementia," said one student. "Clearly, their disease has not changed their relationships. Many people with dementia are much more cognizant and competent than the average medical student or individual may think."

Another student said, "It gave us a chance to interact with patients with dementia in a context when their dementia isn't the main focus, when we get to see what they are capable of more so than what they are incapable of—which so often is what cognitive tests force a patient to do."

The medical students took tests measuring their attitudes toward [dementia](#) before and after the museum visit. Overall, their scores increased from 97 to 106 on a test where scores can range from 20 for

the least [favorable attitude](#) to 140 as the most favorable attitude. By comparison, in another study with medical students scores improved by 16 points after a four-week program.

"A day at the [museum](#) might be a wise prescription for helping students become compassionate doctors and giving them a better understanding of how patients and caregivers continue their relationships and quality of life despite their diagnosis," said study author James M. Noble MD, MS, with Columbia University Medical Center in New York and a member of the American Academy of Neurology, who conducted the study with [medical student](#) Hannah J. Roberts.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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