

# Taking Medical Education into the 19th Century: An Immodest Proposal

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There is often little humanity infused into medical schools' curricula. The necessity of transmitting a vast amount of scientific information seems to preclude the incorporation of literature and the arts to any meaningful degree. There is only one feasible solution: medical knowledge should be communicated to students through verse, the traditional vehicle for more exalted human expression. Indeed, many examples of medical topics exist in the poetical literature, including Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Browning's *Porphyria's Lover*, and the *Ode to Florence Nightingale* by Keats.

To get this project started, I present below a modest example of the new form of medical education that I advocate. This poem instructs students on the basic principles of ectopic pregnancy and its attendant complications.

### *Fimbria's Lament*

Each embryo must select a home when it's just microscopic.  
Some overrate their neighborhood and show themselves myopic:  
They say "Here in Fallopia  
I may find Utopia.  
I think I'll remain here, ectopic."

While youthful cells establish a mitotic free-for-all,  
The errant embryo sets up shop within the tubal wall.  
It secretes hCG,  
But it's less than you'd see  
Had it chosen to live down the hall.

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As this young fellow grows, what signs and symptoms will ensue?

Amenorrhea by itself may be a helpful clue.  
But the meaning's more plain  
If there's also some pain  
In the pelvis on systems review.

Some vaginal bleeding may be seen; it seldom is severe.  
And symptoms of a pregnancy might very well appear.  
You may note as you pass  
A firm palpable mass—  
In that mass is the young mutineer.

An ultrasound exam can be quite useful, you'll agree;  
A beta hCG will help you judge that which you see:  
If there's naught in the womb  
But the hormone's in bloom,  
Then its source must another place be.

You've got to catch this early so that you may then avoid  
A catastrophic rupture where the tubal wall's destroyed.  
It's a course often tragic  
And quite hemorrhagic.  
Aggressive steps must be employed.

Thus you will be a better and more competent physician  
If you maintain for this event high clinical suspicion.  
Know the young, ere they're born,  
Can refuse to conform  
And not ask for their mothers' permission.

With the implementation of these changes in the curriculum, I feel that medical education will be done a great service. Medical students should know that a couplet can be more than just two consecutive ventricular ectopic depolarizations.