**Reflective essay**

By Cassandra Poirier

I first came to know and deeply appreciate the contents of the Osler library during my undergraduate degree in Honours Psychology at McGill University. The Osler library was the only place where I could obtain a hard copy of the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-I) published in 1952. Although the diagnostic criteria for a multitude of mental illnesses listed in the DSM-I were often quoted and frequently mentioned during my undergraduate courses, I was never able to find a copy of the DSM-I online or in any other library, for that matter. Of course, the DSM-I has not been used for any clinical purposes since the 1950’s. However, it was a very interesting experience for me to map out the substantial revisions of the DSM criteria for schizophrenia *verbatim* over time (see Appendix 1 of my Osler essay). The Osler Library became one of my favorite places on campus since I started my academic journey at McGill. In addition to my B.A. in Honors Psychology, I also obtained a B.Sc. in Cell and Molecular Biology and an M.Sc. in Transcultural Psychiatry, and I am currently completing my fourth year of medical school at McGill. Throughout this non-traditional academic path toward becoming a physician, I always frequented the Osler Library for different needs and purposes.

In order to provide an accurate account of shamanism, historical views of shamans, comparisons to the DSM’s criteria for schizophrenia as they have changed over time, and counterarguments to these views, I needed to use several books and resources found in the Osler Library (see Reference list). In my essay, I borrow several concepts from numerous fields of study, including philosophy, anthropology, art, psychology, psychiatry, ethnographic research, sociology, medicine, among others. Although the resources I obtained from the Osler Library allowed me to write about these different perspectives in great detail and to thrive as a researcher, I unfortunately had to be selective in what I chose to include in my essay owing to the 3,000-word limit.

I took great pleasure in writing about this topic, especially given that I am pursuing a career in medicine where such topics are seldomly discussed. The shaman is often referred to as the ‘wounded healer,’ drawing the strength of his therapeutic power from his past suffering(s). The image of the wounded healer is also seen in the Asklepian religious cults of ancient Greece (Kirmayer 2003). Reading the mythological accounts of Asclepius, his rod being the symbol of medicine, was the perfect adjunct to my research on shamans. Important lessons can be learned from the changing perspective of shamans over time. As future physicians, it is important to be aware of cross-cultural differences in clinical encounters and to not be so quick to label something that may appear unfamiliar or strange as pathological or abnormal. We learn to organize our thoughts and actions into categories of convenience in order to serve our community as health care professionals. However, physicians fall too often victim to their own category fallacies by noy considering the sociocultural context of a given clinical encounter. In order to truly best serve our communities, it is essential to be aware that such cross-cultural differences do exist and that different patients and healers may differ in their views of the clinical encounter, their ways of making sense of illness, and their expectations of the healing process.

In sum, I truly enjoyed writing my essay for the Osler competition and feel as though I have grown as a researcher and a future physician.