

**FEAR VS. AMUSEMENT:**

**ENGAGING YOUNG PUBLIC IN MEDICAL HISTORY AND MEDICAL MUSEUMS**

Judit Worley

Museum assistant, Museum of Medical History, Uppsala, Sweden

The project "Engaging young public in medical history and medical museums" started in 2017. The goal of the project was to produce different types of educational programs for the Museum of Medical History in Uppsala that would help to make the museum's displays more adaptive to new audiences. Our chief target group was the youth, but the goal must be accomplished without changing the museum's well-established profile as a resource for medical professionals.

Previous observations and studies of the medical history museum in Uppsala's audience showed that while the number of museum visitors is gradually growing and the composition of visitors is mixed, the majority of the visitors are medical professionals and people of older age.(Josefsson 2018:20) Previous family programs covering special periods of time, like the yearly December program for traditional mustard making in the old pharmacy room or the autumn school holiday's "find the Smurfs in the exhibition", showed that the general public is indeed open to activities in the museum.

We would like to engage children in medicine, the history of medicine and the medical museum and this requires "attention", that is to say programs and activities, during the whole year. By engaging them, I mean to awake the kids' interest towards the discipline; to establish in people's minds that the children are welcome here; and to make these young visitors come regularly to the museum. Here I introduce the first phase of this long-term project.

From the point of view of having young visitors coming to the museum the museum has indeed some disadvantageous circumstances (1). First of all regarding the nature of the topic, the history of medicine, because this is rather a complex and comprehensive subject to understand at any age. Young children are usually not the priority target group for medical museums given its complexity and often scary medical tools, devices and the psychological burden of sicknesses. Secondly, regarding the displays, the Museum of the History of Medicine is a place rather for medical professionals and researchers than for the general public. The museum provides deep insight and plenty of information about the subject; illustrates the information with pictures, descriptions and by the huge amount of objects themselves. What is actually missing is a general informative text for those people who do not have any previous knowledge about the history of medicine. Thirdly, the museum, at the time being, does not have the resources to establish regular opening hours that is suitable for families. Presently the opening hours clash with the average working hours and school-time. This has made the project focus on school visits and school-holiday programs.

At the beginning of the project "Engaging youth in medical history and medical museums" the main goal was to work out programs that fit to their curriculum and at the same time provide an interesting insight into medical history, furthermore, to let them familiarize with the issue and subject of medicine.

Between October 2017 and May 2018 there were three programs announced for school children in three different age groups; for preschool children (age 3-6), for elementary school children between 7-12 years old, and for teenagers (age 13-18). After every visit the teacher was asked to leave their feedback about the program on a premade questionnaire.

Possibly the most unusual target group for medical history are preschool children, seeing that they are just in the beginning phase of learning basic information about social life and the world. According to the guideline of the National Agency for Education in Sweden (Skolverket 2016) preschools should encourage children to obtain and develop experience about the world, and to lay foundations for lifelong learning. Our museum educational program intends to help fulfilling these requirements by offering a set of activities by which kids will learn about doctors, who they are, what do they do, how to examine the patients as well as to learn about the human body, body parts and inner organs. The program's title is "*Let's play doctors!*" where the game

becomes a way to connect medicine, history, learning and entertainment. The program includes activities that stimulate motor skills like making the first type of stethoscope from paper (we found that learning one fact from medical history is adaptable for this age); it includes singing children songs about body parts, dressing up in medical costumes, and putting bandages on each other.

With the program for elementary school children the idea was to engage them in a game in which after a short guided tour they try their newly acquired knowledge in a quiz. The program called "*Superheroes in the history of medicine*" purposes to introduce the biggest achievements in the history of medicine together with their developer/inventor, i.e. a prominent person in the field of history of medicine. The name "superheroes" refers to an extraordinary person or an exceptionally skillful or successful person. This program answers the curricular requirements for elementary school students about local history by depicting life in the past and showing the differences between now and then. Through this they learn by costumes, dressing up with the typical look of the past time "superheroes", as well as by listening to the guide about the circumstances of why the selected achievements were needed and important at the time.

For students, age between 14 and 18, the plan was to keep the main points of the guided tour while focusing on the "horrors" of medical history. Trying too hard to make the history of medicine more attractive can lead to disinterest, so the tour will include eye-opening facts, treatments, even the failures of medicine. It will focus on terrifying practices through history like trepanation, bloodletting, and techniques of barber surgeons and so on. Aside from medical knowledge, the historical and social background of the chosen treatment deepens the topic, so the museum visit can be regarded as a part of a history class. The guide gives space to conversation and refers to the curriculum.

Even though it was easiest to suit a program to a high school curriculum seeing as how several subjects connected to medicine -like biology, chemistry and history- are a part of the curriculum I can state that this program is the hardest to make successful because of the age characteristics of a teenager. This program got equally amount of positive and negative feedbacks, so a further revision and rethink of the program is necessary.

Extending the original project by focusing on school holidays, the program "Magic in Medicine" was announced in February 2018 to the general public for kids age 5 to 13. Seeing that the program was held for only a week,

and then only once, from this one program the museum received some very satisfying visitor numbers. The program's goal was to let the children learn about folk medicine and magic while challenging their motor skills by making their own health amulets out of plaster. After a short introduction about what role magic played in folk medicine and how the amulets were used for preventing negative impacts and for curing sicknesses the children continued to ask about historical health amulets, hence their interest were clearly awakened.

The above mentioned programs exemplify how we tried to convert a complex discipline to age related infotainment balancing between their curriculum and a selected segment of the history of medicine. The strengths of the programs are that they can be conducted without any big changes to the museum's displays and with little impact on the museums budget: aside from prints, few general first aid tools, functioning toy stethoscope and homemade costumes, neither of the programs required big investment.

The hypotheses of young visitors being in a medical museum was firstly that the history of medicine was regarded as scary with all the lethal sicknesses and medical tools and devices, and secondly the complexity and the unfamiliar medical terms would even push children away from medicine if one visits without guiding. However, brief interviews with visitors from different age groups provided just the opposite. While younger visitors found the museum to be "quite interesting" with "lot of things to explore" that aroused curiosity, and was at time "gross". They even found the evolution of medical tools and devices "amusing". It was rather the adults who described the museum as scary and the overall feeling while in the medical history museum as uncomfortable: "One looks at the objects and feels them being used on oneself". Therefore, the first lesson was to make, if possible, the visitor think with a child's mind instead of adults. The second one was to build a better connection and cooperation with the teachers, on the one hand for the sake of a more suited or desired program regarding the composition of school classes and on the other hand to win the teachers support and make them see that this museum visit can be a good addition to their lessons. They are, in fact, the key when it comes to bringing school classes into the museum.

The Medical History Museum in Uppsala is a small museum with great potential. Engaging the youth, in both their formal education and in their free time or family activities, is just one project the museum is presently working on. Even though this project is in its starting phase, I think we are on the right path,

looking forward to the next step to expand the program to a more general level to everyday visits.

#### REFERENCES

1. I really want to emphasize here the point of view of young visitors/general public. The mentioned circumstances in fact are rather positive looking at them by different aspects of the museum.
2. Josefsson, Urban (2018), Medicinhistoriska Museet, Årsrapport, Uppsalas Medicinhistoriska Förenings Årskrift. 20-26.
3. Skolverket (2016), Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö 98. Reviderad 2016. Skolverket.