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## Patient interviews, students writings

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# Patient interviews student writings

Analysis of 332 free texts from medical students drafted after an exploratory meeting with someone with a chronic illness.

Does being exposed to the experiential knowledge of patients help students develop their reflexivity and empathic skills?



Medical Social Sciences and Humanities teaching, 3rd year of medicine (FGSM3) in Lyon, France.

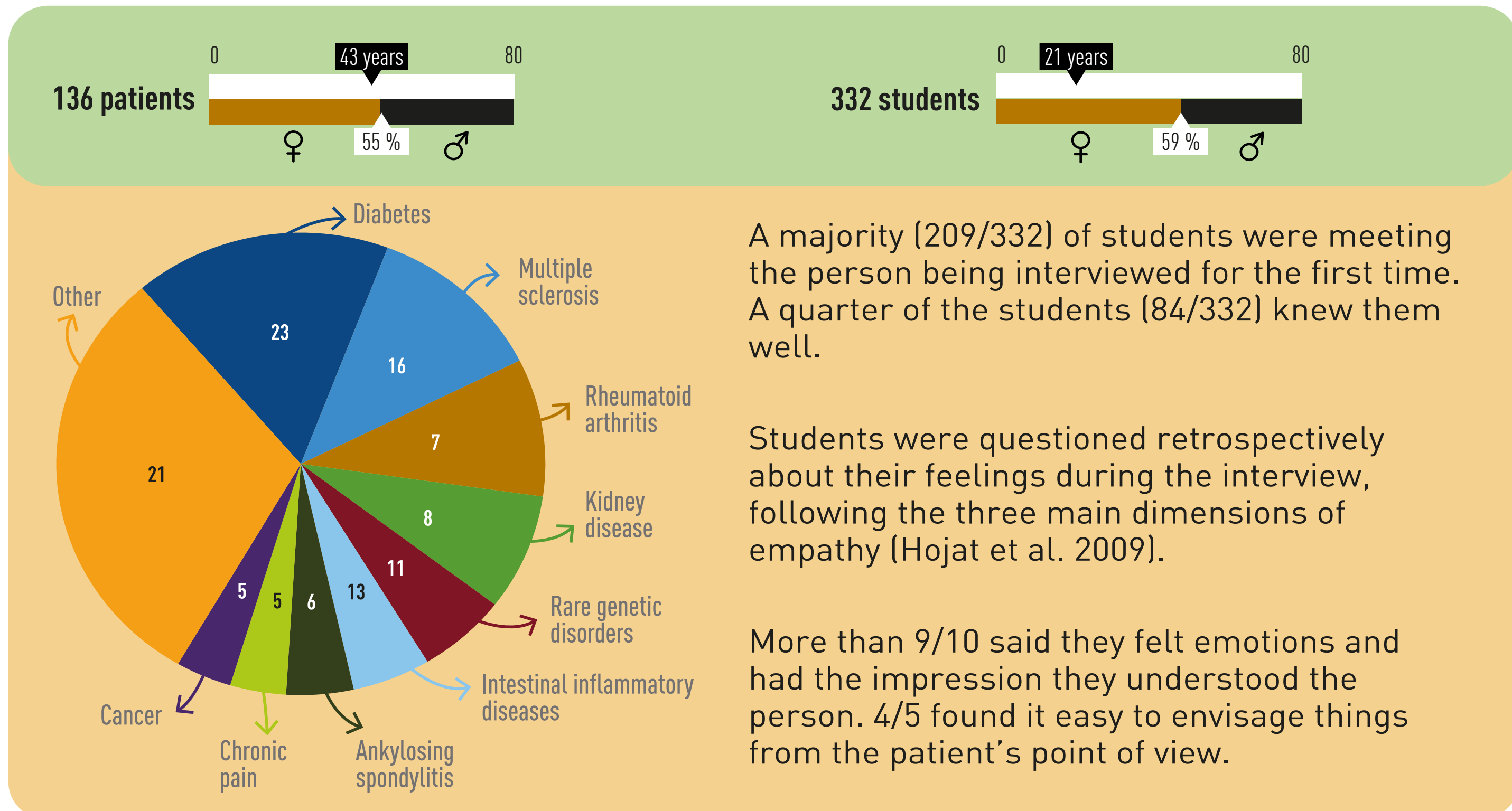
**Instruction 1** Conduct an exploratory interview with a person affected by a chronic illness. The interview (in groups of 2 or 3 students) will take place outside the care setting, for example in a café or the patient's home. Particular attention should be paid to what has been learned.



**Instruction 2** write a personal text-about the interview, based on your experience.

Evaluation using 4 criteria:  
 - Formal quality  
 - Consistency  
 - Attention to detail  
 - Originality

322 texts :  
 Ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 characters  
 Free texts (variety of registers: accounts, letters, fiction, etc.)  
 15 texts were deemed to be particularly interesting and were brought together in a collection.



A majority [209/332] of students were meeting the person being interviewed for the first time. A quarter of the students [84/332] knew them well.

Students were questioned retrospectively about their feelings during the interview, following the three main dimensions of empathy (Hojat et al. 2009).

More than 9/10 said they felt emotions and had the impression they understood the person. 4/5 found it easy to envisage things from the patient's point of view.

## Aims of the analysis

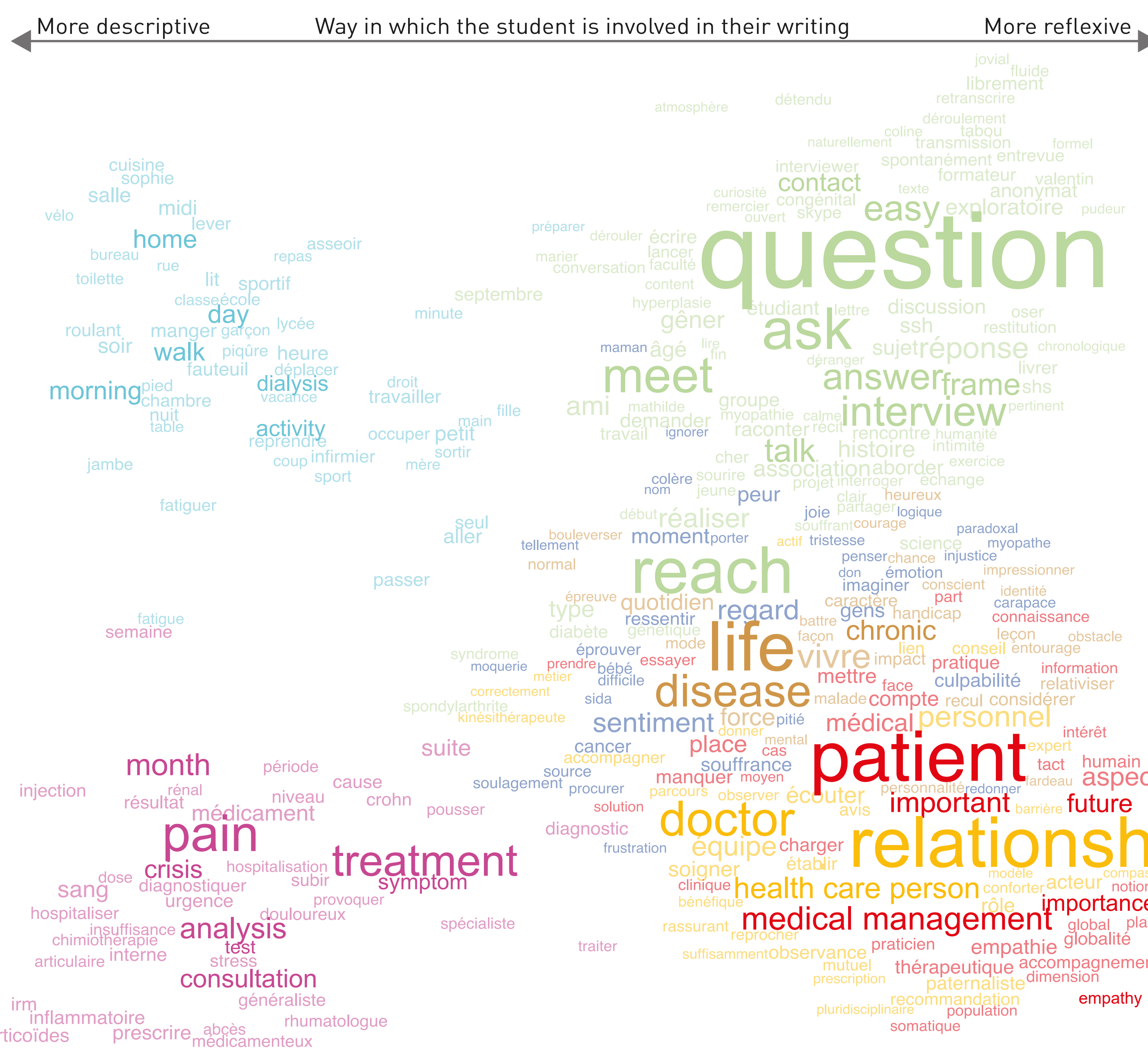
- To gain an overview of the global content of the texts
- To identify the forms of ethical and practical commitments formulated by the students

## Factorial correspondence analysis

A lexicometric study of the entire corpus (387,000 words) was conducted using IRaMuteQ open source software (Ratinaud and Marchand 2015).

Each colour corresponds to a class, built using hierarchical cluster analysis (divisive type) (Alceste/Reinert method).

The larger the word, the more it is associated with the cluster which it contributes towards building.



## What do the students talk about in these texts?

- Patients' daily activities
- Patients' biomedical trajectories
- Context of the interview and how it took place

In this representation of the correspondence analysis, there are four clusters which are closely related to one another:

- Emotions and affects
- Psychosocial impact of the chronic illness
- Relationship between patients and healthcare providers
- Ethical and practical commitments

## Ethical and practical commitments

The students envisage a holistic, patient-centred approach. In these excerpts, the words in red are those which are most often connected with the 'commitments' cluster:

«As a **future** healthcare professional, it is **important** to understand that the patient is, above all, a **human being**; and **treatment** must be built upon an alliance between **doctor** and **patient**.»

« (...) I realised that it is **important** to be able to hand over when you don't know, so that the patient can get the **best care** possible. It is also very **important** to **take into account** the patient's **pain** and **anxiety** in my **future practice**.»

«It is **important** to **try** to **put** yourself in the patient's position to become real allies in the **doctor-patient relationship**. I am now **counting** heavily upon internships and direct contact with patients to continue to develop both **knowledge** and **interpersonal skills**.»

« (...) hence the **importance** for us as doctors to **fully explain** to the patient from the very start what is involved in **establishing good care**, even if the patient doesn't feel like the **symptoms** are **important**.»

«As **future doctors**, we have our **own perspective** of the disease, but it is **important** not to **forget** to take into account **social issues** and how **stigmatisation** may impact patients' **lives**.»

« (...) this helped us to **put ourselves** in the person's **place** so that, in the **future**, we ask **patients** the right questions and define together the **best treatment** they would be able to cope with.»

« (...) **listening, support, and respect** for patients' rights. I hope as a Doctor that you **understand** the **importance** of my request and will **implement** the **resources** needed to treat our **patient** as best as possible.»

«I took note of the **patient's** comments and will always **strive** to **put** myself in the patient's shoes in my **future medical practice**.»

## Results

- Meeting patients and sharing their experiences encourages students to formulate ethical and practical commitments.
- In their texts, the students explored psychosocial, emotional and relational realms, on the basis of their own experience. They reflected upon the direction their future practices should take.
- Students often mentioned a kind of epiphany, a conversion to the patient's point of view.

## Discussion

- Exploration of the student's texts shows that personal interviews with patients elicit reflexivity and encourage empathy, as previously reported (Kelm et al. 2014). Meeting a patient and writing an account therefore facilitates learning and bolsters professional development.
- The content of the texts may have been different had the interviews been carried out in the hospital. There are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that differences in status are more pronounced in the hospital and that students have to stick more clearly to their role as medical trainees. Our study confirms the educational value of carrying out such interviews in the home, as previously stressed by Mullen et al. (2010) and Yuen et al. (2006)
- It is hoped that commitments which were recurrently found in the students' texts will help them face and overcome the risk of 'empathy decline', which has been observed during medical training (Neumann 2011).

PATIENT INTERVIEWS + WRITING  
 = EXPERIENCE WHICH  
 IS BOTH FUN AND EDUCATIONAL  
 FOR STUDENTS, ENABLING THEM TO  
 IMAGINE THEMSELVES IN THEIR  
 FUTURE PRACTICE AND TO DEVELOP  
 PERSONAL ETHICAL  
 AND PRACTICAL COMMITMENTS