

Medical Humanities Update

At the intersection of medicine and everything else

MCW MEDICAL HUMANITIES UPDATE

From the MCW Medical Humanities Program and its affiliated faculty, trainees and students.

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Edifying Empathy *The Healer’s Art Course*

By Anna Miller, Intern, Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities, Marquette University ‘17

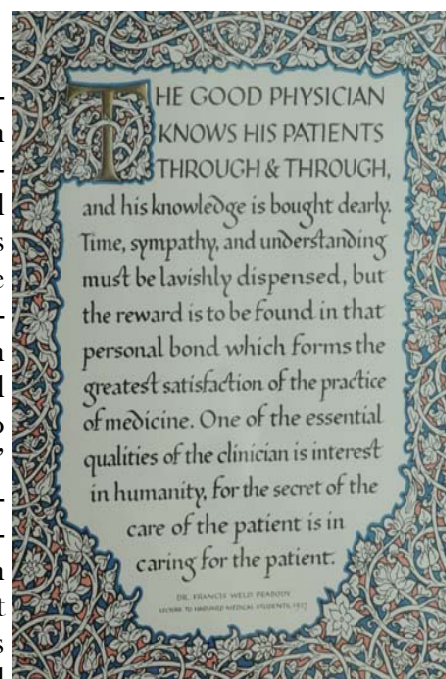
“In the medical culture world-wide, we are highly trained in the areas of cognition, intellect, knowledge and technical skills, while the other aspects of our common humanity—the heart, the intuition and soul—are less respected and even disrespected,” says Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen.¹ In order to foster aspects of physicians’ common humanity, and especially their capacity to empathize with patients, Dr. Remen created the Healer’s Art course, a medical humanities course taught in medical schools across the country.

Offered to first year students at MCW as a seminar-style elective, the Healer’s Art course includes five three-hour sessions that are structured around large and small group discussions. In these sessions, according to Dr. Remen, “students are woven into the lineage of medicine through the sharing of stories and the recognition of the underlying common intent to serve.”² This sharing of stories also creates a profound sense of community among medical students and their instructors that is far removed from the fiercely competitive nature of medical school.

The course attempts to fill a gap in the medical school curriculum, a gap based in the lack of the humanities in other aspects of medical instruction. The goal of humanities courses like the Healer’s Art is to foster empathic growth in medical students, so that they are better able to care for their patients as whole people.

Empathic growth is proven to have immense benefits in clinical

Upon entering the Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities, one encounters this sign, which encompasses the mission of the center and of healer’s art course.





When Breath Becomes Air Review

By Anna Miller

Paul Kalanithi was months away from finishing his residency in neurosurgery when he was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer. This book is his testament to a lifelong search for meaning written in his dying days as he transitions from doctor to patient. *When Breath Becomes Air* is available in the Uihlein Collection of the Todd Wehr Library.

Dr. Kalanithi draws from a wide breadth of sources to discuss his life as transformed by terminal illness. As a lifelong literary connoisseur, he discusses Camus, Whitman, Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, and many others, mulling over how their timeless words can illuminate experiences of life lived in the face of death.

He also describes how his wife, his newborn baby, his family and friends support his spirit in the face of premature death. His relationships, he says, make time slow down, so that every single moment is one of infinite fulfillment.

Writing with breath-taking clarity and beauty, Dr. Kalanithi provides an account of how medicine is only a small-fraction of how patients experience not only death, but life. Relationships, literature and a smile on a baby's face all contribute to one's sublime experience of life and provide meaning in the face of death.

"I was pursuing medicine to bear witness to the twinned mysteries of death, its experiential and biological manifestations: at once deeply personal and utterly impersonal." (WBBA, 53)

Image credit: newyorker.com

practice. A physician's empathy is effective in helping patients cope with their illness and aid them in gaining agency in healing, which can produce more effective shared-decision-making between the doctor and the patient.³ Not only does it improve the patient-physician relationship, the empathy gained by courses like the Healer's Art course can prevent burnout both in medical students and physicians.

The course has had highly positive reviews from students taking it across the country. One student said that the healer's art course is "a great opportunity to be human. I stopped feeling human when I started med school."⁴ Students report being "re-centered" in their goal of being a physician because the course allows time for reflection and the reminder that medicine is about service, service to the holistic needs of the patient.

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⁵Halpern, Jodi, and Margaret Olivia Little. "Motivating Health: Empathy and the Normative Activity of Coping." *Naturalized Bioethics: Toward Responsible Knowing and Practice*. Comp. Hilde Lindemann, Marian Verkerk, and Margaret Urban Walker. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

The Concluding Healer's Art Exercise

By Anna Miller

It was the last session of the Healer's Art course for the first year students at MCW. The students continued the conversations they had had in their small group sessions, telling amusing stories and reflecting on the paths that had led them to medicine. The conversations halted as Dr. Arthur Derse, head of the Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities, silenced the chatter and welcomed Dr. Bruce Campbell, a Healer's Art faculty member, to speak.

Dr. Campbell commenced by asking this vital question:

What happens to take a room full of physicians who all felt at some point in their lives, as you do, to think that medicine is a calling, to turn many of them, maybe most of them, into people who think that medicine is a job? What's the difference?

If the students weren't paying attention before, they were paying attention now. Dr. Campbell's speech hit at their biggest fears about being physicians...would they become impartial, cold? Would they treat medicine as a job? Fortunately, Dr. Campbell had some words of wisdom for the aspiring physicians: to focus on the relationships they form with patients and to define what makes the medical field important them.

This advice is at the core of the central exercise of this last session: the students were to write their own Hippocratic oaths. These oaths would be in the form of three to four sentences, describing what they want their life in medicine to be like. The students were given ten minutes to write these essential words, and were then

then invited to share their oaths with the group.

The oaths sounded like prayers, prayers encompassed by an invigorating hope. These students did not want to be the physicians that saw medicine as a job...they wanted to be healers. One student said "Let me keep my voice so that I can lend it to my patients when they are not heard." Another echoed a similar sentiment: "all I am is no longer mine, a freely given gift to all who ask."

Healer's Art Students thank St. Matthews Church for their support and "feely hearts."



Derse concluded the session by reminding the students to remember their feely hearts, which are plush hearts sown together for them by St. Matthew's Church in Wauwatosa. He told the students that they were always welcome to come back to talk to their faculty mentor, someone who knows the struggles they will deal with as medical practitioners.

The students handed in their Hippocratic oaths, to be given back shortly before graduation in their fourth year to remind them of

One student's oath was deeply poetic: "let me see patients as a physical body at first glance but more so a complex soul fostering the deep intricacies of the human condition." Another echoed the central aim of the course: "Please help me never forget why I entered this profession and to never lose my passion to serve."

their reasons for wanting to become physicians. The students slowly filed out of the room, leaving with a renewed understanding of their important role as a physician and of the reason they endure the long, grueling hours of medical school and chronic lack of sleep. Because of the Healer's Art Course they will their goals are in mind, and these goals will be beacons of hope shining in the dark depths of 32-hour shifts.

After all who wanted to share their oaths spoke, Dr.

55-Word Short Stories

Fourth year students at MCW have the opportunity to take a course called "the Art of Medicine," which allows them to use the humanities to reflect on their position as a physician before moving forward in their careers. The students engage in activities like journal-keeping, sculpting, and attending plays. Also, because of faculty remember Dr. Cynthia Morganweck, they write 55-word short stories, two of which are featured below:

"First Shift"

By Carlos A. Jaramillo IV, '16

Middle of the night. New student, new intern, construction.
Irritated, salty nurse.
Scared sick she is daddy's little girl. They don't speak English.
Screams and staff fill her room.
Fast decomposing medication, critical infusion time-frame. It makes her nauseous.
Lost IV, again. Anxiety.
We give a rare diagnosis, but don't have answers
- only frustration.

"A Pest in a Short White Coat"

By Jennifer Haas, '16

I stood stuffed in the corner of the packed exam room.
The elderly patient let me stay. Her daughters wanted me out.
Attending discussed the blood clot and treatments.
One daughter took notes, misspellings abound-ed.
I wrote the correct words on paper, handed them over.
As we left she smiled, thanked me for the help.

MCW Fellow Performs Poems at *Listen to Your Mother*

By Anna Miller

Dr. Brittany Bettendorf, a rheumatology fellow and a Healer’s Art course faculty member, was selected to be a cast member of *Listen to Your Mother*, a live performance presented at Alverno College’s Pittman Theater that occurred on May 1, 2016.

She performed a series of four poems entitled “One Revolution: First Year.” Each poem is named for a season and reflects her experiences as a new mother, seeing the world anew through her son’s eyes. Her poems reflect the mission of *Listen to Your mother*, which is “to take the audience on a well-crafted journey that celebrates and validates mothering through giving voice to motherhood.” The performance also supports motherhood financially, as 10% of ticket proceeds go to a relevant local cause.

Dr. Bettendorf was inspired to write these poems by her one-year old son. She says, “I have learned so much in the past year from watching how he learns and explores the world with fresh eyes.” When she saw a little girl give him a leaf and he explored its texture with complete fascination, she was overcome by the novelty of his experiences and was inspired to write “Fall.” Bettendorf expanded “Fall” into a four poem series after reading the book “Listen to Your Mother” and being prompted by the Moving Pens facilitator, Kim Suhr, to submit it this performance.

The Moving Pens, a writing group with MCW and Red Oak Writing, was instrumental in Dr. Bettendorf’s development of these poems.

She says that being in the groups allows her to set aside time for writing and to keep her writing on task. The group’s feedback gave her new perspectives on her poems and continued to inspire her to write.

She is a lifelong poet. Her own mother was her first audience and still supports her poetry today: “I used to fold 2 sheets of paper together as a kid and staple the edges to make my own poetry magazine- the only subscriber was my mother. Ironically, now I will be reading my poetry at ‘Listen to Your Mother’ and recruiting my mom yet again to be part of the audience.” Dr. Bettendorf continued to pursue poetry in college, double majoring in poetry and neurobiology. She still brings her love of a poetry into her medical profession, often writing poems related to medicine.

Dr. Bettendorf writes poetry about anything and everything that inspires her. Because medicine is such a large part of her life, her poems are often infused with medical language. Since motherhood is now such a large part of her identity, it has also become a major theme of her poems.



Dr. Brittany Bettendorf at *Listen to our Mother* performance

The Bitter Pill



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Children's Hospital Physician Practices Mindfulness Meditation

"In mindfulness one is not only restful and happy, but alert and awake. Meditation is not evasion; it is a serene encounter with reality." -Thich Nhat Han, author of *The Miracle of Mindfulness*¹



Dr. Steven Weisman,
Children's Hospital of
Wisconsin

By: Anna Miller

Mindfulness meditation is the practice of bringing purposeful and nonjudgmental awareness to thoughts, experiences and feelings guided by focus one's breath.² Recent studies have demonstrated the immense benefits of practicing mindfulness meditation in healthcare-related fields.³ Dr. Steven Weisman of the Jane B. Pettit Pain and Headache Center of the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin can attest to the veracity of these studies.

Dr. Weisman began mantra-based meditation in college, commencing mindfulness meditation in particular when he realized "how powerful some of the mindfulness techniques would be in helping people learn self-regulation and learning to cope with a lot of different pain problems." In order to help his patients in this regard Dr. Weisman began an 8-week program in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) at the University of Massachusetts's Center for Mindfulness.

Since becoming certified in MBSR Dr. Weisman has used mindfulness meditation not only as an intervention technique with his patients, but also with medical students and healthcare professions. He says that "in the medical world where healthcare providers are so stressed out either by what's wrong with their patients or by the systems in which they have to work having a way to settle yourself, to be present, I think is really helpful and productive." Dr. Weisman's classes for healthcare professionals are typically taught in work-

shop form and he has recently started a course as an elective of mindfulness meditation at MCW. He also teaches an introduction to mindfulness meditation in the Healer's Art course.

Dr. Weisman also says that mindfulness meditation can be helpful in building communication skills in the medical profession. He says that the number one benefit of his practice of mindfulness is that it has taught him to be a better listener. Active listening, he espouses, is a way to allow patients "to open up and share what their problems are."

Studies confirm Dr. Weisman's account of the increased communication skills associated with mindfulness meditation. These studies show that physicians who engage in even a short term session of mindfulness courses have long term benefits in terms of reducing psychological stress and increasing empathic capacities. Physicians who rate themselves as more mindful are also shown to "engage in more patient-centered communication and have more satisfied patients."⁴

Not only can mindfulness help patients, it can help healthcare professionals find a space of peace in the midst of the stress and chaos of medicine. Practices like mindfulness meditation give hope to a promising future of medicine, a future where physicians are able to truly listen to the dynamic stories their patients tell them.

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Tenth Annual MCW Muses

On Friday, April 22, 2016 physicians, medical students and other healthcare professionals gathered to celebrate the intersection between medicine and the arts for the tenth annual MCW Muses event. MCW Muses is a culmination of the culture of humanities that MCW promotes and is sponsored by MCW Medical Humanities, the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Program, and the Society of Teaching Scholars.

The day-long event displayed a wide-variety of forms of art, including flash-





fiction pieces, 55-word short stories and comics, as well as photography, oil paintings and knitted pieces. In addition, around midday there were four vocal performances.

Unique to this year's Muses was Dr. Sabina Diehr's display of hand-made soaps. Dr. Diehr, pictured left, is a family medicine doctor and associate professor at MCW, who learned to make soaps in her spare time. She even started her own company, Lowenzhan soaps, which sells her hand-crafted vegan soaps. She says that each one tells a story, such as her new fire monkey soap, which she made to celebrate the Chinese new year.

If you would like to purchase her soaps, you can contact her at lowenzahn.soaps@gmail.com.

2 Pieces by Joe Hodapp

First year medical student Joe Hodapp has been writing fiction since he was in fourth grade and has carried his love of writing with him to medical school. In his first semester at MCW Hodapp joined the writing group the Moving Pens who helped him workshop the two pieces featured below. The Moving Pens is a writing group sponsored by the MCW Medical Humanities program, in collaboration with Red Oak Writing.

Hodapp says that he was inspired to join the Moving Pens because he felt that his medical education was not giving him the space to create and express himself, which he does through writing. For Hodapp, writing is an essential activity because it is ultimately about "experiencing the world, trying to understand it in my own way, and using language to paint a picture that can be shared with others."

Though he did not come to medical school with the intention of writing about patient experiences, he says that "good writing comes from a place of truth," which for him now, as a physician in training, comes from his experiences with patients.

First Look Through An Ophthalmoscope

I approach the translucent window,
A milky opacity locking tight its hinges.
Vainly I press forward, reaching
for the soft sill on which to rest my hand.
With a bare warning I am there,
Peering out on a foggy new realm.
I crook my finger, one click or two --
the fog dissipates, melting into cool clarity.

A pale pregnant moon hangs in a wine-drop sky.
Splayed limbs of a redbud tree throb and pulsate,
Striving to obscure the yellow orb resting behind.
Some brief cloud cover textures the firmament.
Stricken by the beauty, a thought blossoms:

No wonder the soul resides in a universe of its
own.

Offering Truth

When I came upon the hole in the earth, dappled sunlight diffusing into empty gloom, I feared what I might find. Dropping to my hands, kneecaps pressing into loamy ground, I peered into the depths of this hole, gripping its edge -- knuckles white. I sensed he was there, at the bottom, shrouded in night-black while the sun above embraced my shoulders. The darkness enveloped my vision, cutting the light, eating it away. As my eyes began to adjust, he took form. "Sir," my voice reached down. "Sir, I am afraid you are stuck in a deep hole." It may seem obvious, but these things must be explained to those who know little of the difference between a hole and the world above. "I am, am I?" he replied, quizzically, not fully understanding. As his eyes turned skyward, however, a pinprick of filtered light breaking through the enclosing darkness lit his face. Fear struck him first, perhaps the first makings of wonder. "Yes, indeed," said I. "And I will do my utmost to get you out of it."