

Narrative Writing: A Tool for Relational Organizing

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September 6, 2020

Introduction

- [Relational organizing](#): process by which individuals harness their personal and professional relationships to engage in interpersonal communication with the goal of effecting community change
- [Narrative medicine](#): hearing and telling people's health-related stories to acknowledge and process suffering, connect with others, and create change
- Narrative medicine helps clarify medicine's central narrative situations:
 - Health professional & patient
 - Health professional & self
 - Health professional & colleagues
 - Health professional & society
- Narrative medicine can be used:
 - As a model for humane and effective medical practice
 - As a foundational skill for relational organizing
 - To help patients, caregivers, and health professionals voice their experiences
 - To create systems-level change via advocacy
 - To express and process feelings about complex experiences, both professional & personal
 - By anyone, not just for health professionals

Benefits of Narrative Medicine

- Increase empathy for:
 - Health professionals (self and colleagues)
 - Patients and their families
 - Others who are in similar situations
- Storytelling & reflection provide:
 - Coping mechanisms for patients
 - Connection for patients and providers
- Improved diagnosis and treatment planning via qualitative skill-building

Potential Implications

- Narrative medicine can be destabilizing, as it requires a significant change in perspective
 - Consider it a tool to help yourself and others process suffering
 - Should not be used as a replacement for medical knowledge
 - Not every patient (or health professional) wants to share their story
- [Regarding HIPAA](#) (and patient rights & privacy):
 - It is okay to write about qualitative data / experiences, **without** using patient identifiers
 - Oftentimes, demographic and situational details can be altered while larger themes remain intact
 - Patient consent is not explicitly required, though it is recommended

Workshop Exercise

- Read / listen to Jim Moore's 2018 poem "[Whatever Else](#)" (at least once!)
- Reflect:
 - What do you notice?
 - Dark themes (police brutality, environmental destruction, suffering) represent ongoing injustices
 - The title might evoke helplessness and loss of control, or hope
 - What resonates with you?
 - What images stick with you?

Resources

- Narrative Medicine and JAMA's [A Piece of My Mind](#)
- [Pulse: Voices from the Heart of Medicine](#)
- Rita Charon's 2002 *Stories Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics*
- Arthur Kleinman's 1988 *The Illness Narratives*