

Reflective Writing to Promote Resiliency CORD Academic Assembly

**Maricopa Medical Center
Paul Blackburn, DO
Melody Glenn, MD**

Origins and Inspiration

Melody Glenn, MD (MG): A four-week course during the senior year of medical school at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California. The course consisted of weekly required readings with related writing assignments. The writings were shared and discussed, but not critiqued. What emerged was a realization of commonality of experiences, plus summation and closure of the medical school experience.

Pamela Schaff, MD Associate Dean for Curriculum
Director, Program in Medical Humanities

“Through engagement with the humanities, students will be encouraged to explore ethical decision-making, cultural differences in worldview, and the complexities of the interpretive act —the ‘multiple ways of knowing —’ that are essential to the effective practice of the healing arts.”

Paul Blackburn, DO (PB): Faculty Reviewer for the Reflective Writings Program at the University of Arizona College of Medicine/Phoenix, Phoenix, Arizona. The writings are required biennial focused writings based on selected readings. Also included are specific circumstances, such as letters of appreciation from MS I students to their donor cadavers.

Jennifer Hartmark-Hill, MD Assistant Professor, Department of Bioethics and Medical
Humanism
Director, The Program for Narrative Medicine &
Medical Humanities

Wellness as Reality

MG: As Chief Resident, there were many discussions regarding wellness and resiliency. The medical humanities, specifically narrative medicine, was seen as one possible approach. One reference source noted positive personal benefits after writing 4 – 5 days of writing for 15 minutes per day about an emotional experience. Looking at a longitudinal incorporation of the process, we incorporated a curriculum for the EM I residents.

PB: As an Attending Physician with 24+ years of experience in academic Emergency Medicine, many successes and failures regarding personal wellness had been observed – and experienced. A trial of an ongoing, longitudinal interaction with the medical humanities was implemented. The initial experience with the EM I resident physicians has been expanded into the subsequent year group, with plans to incorporate the incoming 2017 group of EM I residents. This will finalize the process of including all EM residents at Maricopa Medical Center in the reflective writing process.

Objectives

- Incorporate private expressive writing in your wellness routine as a method to help recovery from trauma and stress.
- Use shared writing to build affiliation among colleagues.
- Use literature, art, and personal writing to analyze and give meaning to clinical encounters.
- Use “close reading” and “close listening” techniques to improve patient care.

Structure

- During dedicated conference time, one-hour block.
Preparatory readings?
- Monthly.
Subsequent years changed to quarterly.
- Interns only.
Closed meetings except for the group and the attendant.
Subsequent years included as separate year groups.
- The Writing.
During vs. Prior To the writing session.
Letter to themselves at the beginning of the year.
- Sharing of information.
Individual readings.
Group discussions.
- Confidentiality.
Complete.
Exceptions only for possible ethical, moral, professional, or legal issues.

Positive Feedback

- ⌘ “The sessions serve a relaxing purpose as well as bonding since we are experiencing similar challenges.”
- ⌘ “Brings up hidden emotions and opinions”
- ⌘ “It got people to share things that I wouldn't have known otherwise “
- ⌘ “I gained a deeper understanding of my thoughts and the notion that I am not in this alone. It helps to hear other people share similar experiences and sometimes ways to cope.”
- ⌘ “It gives formal space to talk about important emotions that otherwise don't have space to express themselves. “

What We See as Key Elements

- The free discussion is the most valuable part of the experience.
- The preference is class separation, so everyone feels more comfortable and safe discussing common issues – fewer power or hierarchy dynamics.
- It is a space where all can come together and speak freely.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest on the part of either speaker.

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