

Healing the Community through the arts: Framing and Reflections **Lisa M. Wong, MD**

The arts provide the opportunity for us to reach out to our patients, caregivers and community to share in the experience of appreciating and creating beauty. Through music, visual arts, narrative medicine, and poetry, we express ourselves through nonverbal means, struggle safely with ambiguity, learn to be comfortable with the iterative process of creation – and restore health.

My framework is as a pediatrician and musician. I understand life as a series of developmental milestones: things get most messy during periods of the greatest growth – the toddler who is just learning to speak melts down into tantrums when he can't find his words; the five year old struggles with the unknown, but yearns for the independence of getting on that school bus for the first time – and the adolescent who, in attempting to understand himself and learn to fly, flaps desperately on the edge of the nest, creating a lot of wind and dust - and angst for his parents.

The arts can help at transition points like these. Art provides a playground where children can learn nonverbal communication, hone communications skills, and develop resilience and empathy. Art is messy and can bring out emotions but, when out in the open, can be more easily understood and dealt with.


On some level we are all still children. Even in adulthood, the arts can and should continue to be a language we understand and access. The opportunity for self-expression, self-reflection, the mindfulness when one is creating, and the appreciation and aspiration to beauty - are essential for balance and health.

After all, what is health but a restoration of the beautifully functioning work of art that is the human body? Without the arts, we are out of balance.

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Today, I'd like to present an overview of the arts in health. We are in an exciting time. I mentioned that the greatest opportunity for growth is when things are messy, and this field is in a state of rapid, messy growth.

Arts and health encourages interdisciplinary teamwork: between expressive arts therapists, medical professionals, artists, and art neuroscientists. While I won't be going into the studies or neuroscience of this work, there are colleagues here who are enriching the field with literature reviews, discussions, and identifying of the gaps where research needs to go next. And thanks to the brilliant organizers of this conference who are emphasizing INTEGRATION, we all have the opportunity to learn from each other's work and share knowledge across disciplines.



Who are our collaborators in the community of Arts and Health?

- The patient: the arts can reduce pain, lower blood pressure, improve sleep, return control to seemingly uncontrollable situations
- The family member: the arts may provide perspective and understanding, respite and comfort
- The neuroscientist: by using tools such as functional MRI , EEG and PET scan, whose research is helping us understand the brain's response to art and especially music.
- The medical caregiver: the arts can enhance empathy, spark creativity, restore balance, and prevent burnout
- The artist and musician: Much art comes from pain and struggle: by immersing themselves in art for healing or by sharing their knowledge as teaching artists many artists find a new direction, and purpose in the healthcare field
- And the expressive arts therapists (art, music and dance), with their high-level training in both therapy and their art form, they use the arts as their healing tools to improve patient lives in an intentional treatment plan. They also bring academic rigor to the field

Who do we think of when we think about the Arts in Health?

We think of:

- A young child working with a music therapist to learn motor planning through the integration of rhythm and song
- Choruses of people sharing music, immersed in harmony and community that celebrates their abilities - not their disabilities, or their Alzheimers
- Parkinson's patients, who usually struggle with movement initiation and muscle rigidity and rediscover fluidity of movement through dance
- On the other end of the age spectrum, children learn cooperation and improve executive function through adaptive dance

ARTS and HEALTH is

- Students playing for babies in the nursery, gaining a new perspective on infant hearing, maternal responses, and their own role as musicians and healers
- Medical students learning to confront the difficult questions of life and death by reflecting on parallels in that they can more safely discuss in art

- A soldier recovering from a blast injury and PTSD finally finding his trauma-silenced voice - and healing- through mask making and art therapy

Who do we think of when we think about the Arts in Health?

It is ALL of these.

Dr. Theodor Billroth knew this. An avid pianist, he hoped to be a professional musician, but his mother had other plans. He was introduced to the medical field by his uncle, and rose quickly, to become Chief of Surgery at the University of Vienna in 1868 at the age of 38. By day, his curiosity, creativity **and imagination** inspired him to invent and refine new surgical procedures, hold journal reviews and insist on medical rounds that discussed surgical FAILURES as well as successes. By night, as a pianist and violist, he applied the same creativity, curiosity and critical thinking to music as he performed and analyzed the successes and failures of new musical scores by his close friend, Johannes Brahms.

Why do the arts work in healing?

In the framework of person-centered care, we consider that the medical home is where most patients live *with* their chronic illnesses. As technology improves, more people survive their medical challenges – from extreme prematurity to cancer. More people live *with* autism, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and Parkinson's.

How do we meet our patients where they are, and help our patients, their families and ourselves as caregivers -- to find meaning? Through active listening to music or looking at art, through making art, making music, writing narrative the arts demand a different level of engagement.

I'm an arts education advocate for children and students of all ages: Experiencing the frustration and reward of sketching and re-sketching , getting messy with clay, learning a new melody on a musical instrument, trying out a new dance move, or writing a poem: The arts allow a child to grapple with trial and error, failure and success.

Let's think about the process that goes on into arts education and arts engagement. Education researchers Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland have framed arts learning as **8 Studio Habits of Mind**. They found that the training involved in developing these habits transfers to other learning domains beyond art.

You'll see how the Habits of Mind resonates with our work in integrating Arts and Health. Those of you who are scientists will recognize this process in scientific discovery. Those of

you who are healthcare providers will recognize this as the process you go through in developing a treatment plan for your patient.

In creating art, the student/artist/patient/caregiver must deeply engage in their work:

- Envision
- Develop Craft
- Express
- Stretch and Explore
- Reflect
- Engage and Persist
- Observe
- Understand community

Keeping this framework in mind, let's go on a deeper dive through three examples of collaborative Arts and Health.

CASE 1: Creative Forces: Mask-making and integrative care

Historically many of the most innovative and important new medical techniques in patient care arise out of necessity such as the accelerated and magnified need on the battlefield. The development of the trauma unit, enhanced surgical techniques in limb-sparing and innovations in burn treatment are just some examples of techniques learned by combat physicians and brought back to civilian medicine.

In the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, we have seen an epidemic of young American soldiers returning from battle with traumatic brain injuries from blast injuries, injuries from which they previously would not have survived. This is often coupled with Post-traumatic stress syndrome. These patients have a high rate of pain, anxiety, depression, domestic violence and suicide. Many return home unable to speak about their battle experiences, due to both psychological trauma and organic brain injury affecting executive function and speech. Patients describe a difficulty squaring their pre-war world with the world to which they return.

In 2010, the Department of Defense opened a new center of integrative health to address the unseen wounds of war in brain injured patients called The National Intrepid Center of Excellence or "NICoE" at Walter Reed Hospital.

Patients are admitted into an 4 week outpatient program during which time they can live on the military hospital base and receive several hours of intensive therapy a day. Their care integrates traditional medicine with creative arts therapy, psychotherapy, acupuncture, physical therapy, and more.

In a recent paper¹, Art Therapist Melissa Walker and others described the success of a program of mask-making, a common technique used with patients who have experienced trauma. Walker writes that this technique “allows ...some psychological distance [that allows] for expression and externalization.” Guided by a trained art therapist as well as a team of psychotherapists, social workers and other clinicians, this often serves as a catalyst for new insights, which could then be further explored by the collaborative treatment team.

Over the past 5 years, over 1000 masks have been made at NiCoE². The paper evaluates over 300 of these cases, based on therapists notes, patient comments, and the masks themselves, coded for psychological themes including sense of self, grief, loss and dual identity.

At the end of the four weeks, service members are given the choice of what to do with their mask; while some take their masks home with them, others choose not to, symbolically leaving that part of them in the care of NiCoE.

Case 2: Healing the Community through Music

For the past 30 years, I have been a violinist in a unique orchestra in Boston, Longwood Symphony Orchestra, named after the Longwood Medical area at Harvard Medical School. We are not the only orchestra of medical professionals – in fact the Conference Chair Dr. Stefan Willich founded and conducts the World Doctors Orchestra!

What makes Longwood Symphony unique is its mission of service. Inspired by the work of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the orchestra collaborates with a medical nonprofit at every concert.

Young medical musicians who perform in healing spaces witness the power of music to bring families and patients together – and see their patients differently when they return to the hospital wards.

Intrigued by their own experience and curious about how music affected their brain, Longwood Symphony members also convened conferences on Music and the Brain entitled “Crossing the Corpus Callosum.” This is where we learned the importance of

¹ “Active-duty military service members’ visual representation of PTSD and TBI in masks,”

² <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/healing-soldiers/>

INTEGRATION. In bringing experts from different disciplines together from the fields of medicine, music, neuroscience and music therapy, we could all learn from one another.

The Collaboration in Arts and Health Education

Inspired by those early Crossing the Corpus Callosum conferences, we created BACH, BOSTON ARTS CONSORTIUM FOR HEALTH, an organization of over 40 members that brings together institutions across the City who are interested in arts and health. We are made up of artists, museum educators, conservatory musicians, physicians, and music and arts therapists:

- Lesley University offers several masters and undergraduate degrees in expressive arts therapy, focusing on dance, writing and music.
- Berklee College of Music has a program in Music Therapy that was founded over 20 years ago by Dr. Suzanne Hanser, who is one of this conference's organizer

In medical schools across the US, bioethics and humanities have become a required part of medical education. More recently, however, many of our medical schools have incorporated the arts to varying degrees.

Medical education is stressful: rate of burnout and suicide among medical students and residents is high. *Our students are trained to learn the objective possibilities of differential diagnosis – given a set of facts, what is the RIGHT or WRONG. *

But as senior educators, we want our students to go beyond this information –They must get beyond technical knowledge and learn to apply these skills to SEE, not just LOOK and to LISTEN, not just Hear.*

In his 1997 book, The Lost Art of Healing³, Dr. Bernard Lown wrote:

In the brief time available to take a history, the aim is to obtain, in addition to essential facts, insight into the human being. This seems easy, but listening is the most complex and difficult of all the tools in a doctor's repertory. One must be an active listener to hear an unspoken problem.

Engaging with the arts can help develop these skills.

³ Lown, Bernard. *The Lost Art of Healing*. Houghton Mifflin, 1996. ISBN: 0-395-82525-3

We feel that, with exposure, this NEW generation of medical students will take integration to the next level. If they can learn to feel comfortable with accessing the arts for their own well-being and advocating for the arts for their patients.

[Images}


- The Arts and Humanities Initiative at Harvard Medical School seeks to integrate the arts as much as possible into learning. Here the first year medical students are creating art pieces to express and then share their uncertainty about starting their clinical rotations on the wards
- This beautiful work is by Yawei Ge a Harvard MD- PhD student whose research is in mathematical modeling to optimize chemotherapy dosing in breast cancer.
- At the Harvard Art Museums and Museum of Fine arts, students are guided by art educators to learn Visual Thinking Strategies, a technique of deep looking and sharing what they see. The students are encouraged to draw parallels to apply their learning to patient observation when they return to the wards.
- Dr. Joel Katz was a professional visual artist before becoming a physician. At Harvard Medical School and Brigham & Womens Hospital, Joel teaches a course called “Training the Eye” for residents and students. Joel often asks student to explore the museum to find a piece of art that resonates with them. In this case, an exhausted young resident physician chose this work ⁴by Josiah McElheney. What he revealed was an admission he would probably have not have made had he not been able to relate it to art – that the glass bottles reminded him of a night in the emergency room. He shared that, by the end of the night every patient began to look the same and he felt that the flow of patients was never-ending.

Case 4: Back out in the community:

I’d like to close with a few moving images of a place I visited just two days ago here in Berlin. Maintenance of health and prevention of disease begins in the community.

I am so grateful to Berlin pediatrician and violinist Dr. Peter Hauber, who has spent his life caring for children, and creating concerts to raise funds and awareness about social issues of international importance with IPPNW.

⁴ <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/endlessly-repeating-twentieth-century-modernism-503178>



Two days ago, Peter took me to a Container Village here in Berlin. He explained to me that when 80,000 refugees arrived here in 2015, he and his colleagues foresaw that there would be a crisis, not only in health, but in well-being among the children.

Despite his already busy practice, he was soon delivering medical care to the children in one of the Container Villages. Once trust was established, he also brought musical colleagues together from the Berlin Philharmonic and elsewhere to help him create a music program for the children. Today the music program is in five sites around Berlin and continues to grow.

In closing, we see that through thoughtful and purposeful collaboration, integration of the arts in healthcare can make a difference in how we care for patients and how we educate the next generation of artists and healthcare providers.

Thank you to the Congress for including the Arts and Health in your meetings.