

Storymaking: An inter-professional learning experience

To the Editor: In response to the Editorial in the May 2014 edition of *AJHPE*,^[1] I would like to offer an example of medical students who were given an opportunity to engage in inter-professional learning.

In July 2014, I supervised a special study module (SSM) for second-year medical students at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Students could choose a particular field of interest to deepen their understanding of a subject, as well as develop their research and academic writing skills. As a pioneer in the field of medical humanities in Africa, and as a musician, Prof. Steve Reid, head of the Primary Health Care Directorate, had been encouraging the availability of various arts-related modules as part of the SSM curriculum.

As a dramatherapist, I supervised a module entitled 'Theatres of the Psyche'. Students were invited to investigate the role of the dramatic arts within a biopsychosocial approach in treating mental illness. The SSM included a practical component in a psychiatric setting, where we presented two storymaking sessions at Valkenberg Hospital, Cape Town. Some reflections from a student are as follows: 'We get taught a structured mainstream approach, seeing patients for their diseases. This experience helped me to understand a patient is more than their diagnosis, we have to see the person as a whole.'

Hougham^[2] wrote that stories can act as containers for our inner lives. By enacting various parts of a story, we come in touch with different parts of ourselves. When we engage with each other in this process, we can also begin to experience each other as whole beings, who constitute more than our designated roles in certain settings – in this case, the role of student, patient and therapist.

Another important outcome of this was a raised awareness of interdisciplinarity. At the start of this module, students were invited

to attend a conference hosted by the South African Association of Dramatherapists (SAAD) and UCT's Department of Occupational Therapy, entitled 'Healing and social transformation in mental healthcare in South Africa'. This provided an opportunity to engage with a variety of professionals in the field of mental healthcare. Here are the thoughts of one of the students: 'I had the best time. The whole environment was unique. There was an openness and people were welcoming, not just to each other but also to new ideas. I aim to someday be a part of this sharing of knowledge and skills in order to draw from each other and complement each other's unique techniques.'

D'Alessandro and Frager^[3] concluded in their recent study that theatre and story are effective tools in teaching undergraduate medical students. The dramatherapist believes that 'Telling a tale enables each of us to know ourselves as someone who has a voice which is worth listening to, someone who can be heard and understood'.^[4] It is my hope that the arts and medicine will continue to be partners in the training of knowledgeable, reflective and empathic healthcare professionals.

With special thanks to Aisha Najjaar.

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1. Editorial. Does simulation-based training have a future in Africa? *Afr J Health Professions Educ* 2014;6(2):117-118. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7196/AJHPE.534>]
2. Hougham R. Numinosity, symbol and ritual in the Sesame approach. *Dramatherapy* 2006;28(2):3-8.
3. D'Alessandro P, Frager G. Theatre: An innovative teaching tool integrated into core undergraduate medical curriculum. *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice* 2014;6(2):191-204.
4. Gersie A, King N. *Storymaking in Education and Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1990.

Afr J Health Professions Educ 2015;7(1):65. DOI:10.7196/AJHPE.542