

# Teaching Tips

Volume 3 Issue 9

September 2012

## Department of Family & Social Medicine Faculty Development E-Newsletter



### Narrative Medicine in Practice

- Two minutes of listening is enough for 80% of patients to recount their concerns.
- 80% of the information needed to make a diagnosis is in the patient's story.
- More than 80% of students feel that using a parallel chart is beneficial to training.

### Incorporating Narrative Medicine Into Clinical Teaching

The purposeful study of literature and complex stories can restore the lost art of listening to patients and highlight how emotions affect physicians' perceptions, yet clinicians rarely have the time to do so. A narrative approach to medicine can be used daily, however, in both patient and self-care. Preceptors can teach students and residents the importance of:

- Open, active listening of patient stories before asking targeted questions
- Considering the context of the patient's illness experience
- Developing a diagnosis based on the individual rather than disease etiology
- Employing circular questioning and exploring connections
- Writing for self-reflection as a learning tool and/or method to manage stress

### The Parallel Chart vs. Writing Stories

Introduced by Rita Charon of Columbia University, the parallel chart is one method of narrative reflection. It is a personal journal where students write their feelings about a patient's case to mirror the actual medical chart. Discussing the entries helps students identify what was missed, thereby improving patient care. Others believe that writing stories is therapeutic and, when shared, can be powerful reflective tools. For example, Heustein Sy, a 2<sup>nd</sup>-year internal medicine resident states, "writing is an exercise to clear my mind and sort out the wrinkles in my chaotic life. As I put my thoughts down on paper, the noise that surrounds me fades, and I'm able to focus on the things that really matter."



Pulse is an online magazine that uses stories and poems from patients and health care professionals to talk honestly about giving and receiving medical care. To read [Dr. Sy's story](#) or subscribe to the free weekly publication, visit [www.pulsemagazine.org](http://www.pulsemagazine.org)

*If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.*

- Rudyard Kipling

*We breathe, we think, we conceive of our lives as narratives.*

- Christopher Lehmann-Haupt

### References / Resources:

Charon, R. (2001). Narrative medicine: A model for empathy, reflection, profession and trust. *JAMA*; 286(15), 1897-1902.

Kalitzkus, V. & Matthiessen, P. F. (2009). Narrative-based medicine: Potential, pitfalls and practice. *The Permanente Journal*; 13(1), 80-86.

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