

## BECOMING A PHYSICIAN: VOICES OF MEDICAL STUDENTS IN POETRY

- I. Overview of session
  - A. Framework for understanding medical education
  - B. Limitations of current med ed rite of passage
  - C. Writing as a critique of the rite of passage
  - D. Why poetry is special
  - E. Read a medical student poem
  - F. Learn a few ideas about writing a poem
  - G. Write a poem!
- II. Medical Education – Rite of Passage
  - A. Separation from the world  
Individual chosen for privileged/challenging experience
  - B. Transition/marginality  
Individual traverses an alien world  
Caught between roles, neither physician nor patient
  - C. Incorporation  
Individual profoundly changed as a result of
  - D. unusual/demanding experiences
  - E. Assumes new rights, responsibilities
- III. Limitations of Current Rite of Passage
  - A. **Overemphasis on logico-scientific thinking and problem-solving**  
Discounts skills that are linguistic, empathic, interpretive  
Disqualification of narratives (story-telling)
  - B. **Devaluing of personal identity/Discounting of personal experience**  
“Colonizing” the medical student to adopt rigidly defined professional identities  
Processing of experience becomes medicalized
  - C. **Neglect of medicine as a moral enterprise**  
Discourages analysis and expression of values, pursuit of meaning/purpose,  
attention to moral dilemmas
  - D. **Encourages emotional distance between medical students and patients**  
Patients become seen as **OTHER**
- IV. **MS Writing Critiques the Rite of Passage**
  - A. **Medical students question aspects of medical culture**
  - B. **Reflective writing enables them to consider:**  
what is happening to them; what they see happening to those around them;  
from a human perspective
  - C. **Telling stories one way students can examine their experience /understand its possible meanings**

- D. Writing helps students see which aspects of their socialization they wish to retain and which they wish to discard**
- V. Special Features of Poetry**
  - A. Alternative to language of science**
    - Expresses emotion
    - Express particular, subjective experience
  - B. Helps us understand oblique narratives of ourselves and others**
  - C. Boundary-crossing and transgressive**
    - Offers critique of what is
  - D. Insight**
    - New ways of seeing
    - Metaphor, imagery
  - E. Stress-reduction**
- VI. Let's Read a Poem**
- VII. Writing a Poem**
  - A. Find a central image or scene**
    - Some aspect of your life NOW
    - Memorable patient or family member encounter
    - Something wise/shocking attending said to you
  - B. Write down words that associate to that image**
  - C. Put them together**
    - Pay attention to imagery, metaphor, word choice, language
    - Use rhyme scheme, meter, or free verse
- VIII. Tips for Writing Poetry**
  - A. Know your goal**
  - B. Avoid clichés**
  - C. Avoid sentimentality**
  - D. Use images**
  - E. Use metaphor and simile**
  - F. Use concrete words**
  - G. instead of abstract ones**
  - H. Show (don't tell) your feelings**
  - I. Subvert the ordinary**