

FINDING MEANING IN MEDICINE

Since the Fall of 2000, ISHI has been enabling physicians nationwide to develop self-directed, on-going, values and meaning study groups. ISHI's *Finding Meaning in Medicine* Program helps physicians establish self-sustaining story telling and discussion groups that will enable participating physicians to become resources for one another in:

- developing and maintaining a personal sense of covenant and service
- supporting and validating the interactional and relational values that give meaning to the physician's work and strengthen the physician's commitment
- activating more of these values in patient relationships
- strengthening their sense of calling and spiritual community within medicine
- strengthening their individual capacity to see meaning in the stories of their patients

Each story-telling session is focused on one of the basic interactional or interpersonal principles of Hippocratic medicine. The discussion topic organizes each meeting into a group inquiry into this spiritual principle using a shared-narrative techniques and drawing on the experiences shared in common that physicians have daily with this dimension of their work. Each participating physician commits to bringing a story about the topic drawn from his/her personal or professional life or from literature, or a poem, or an exercise to enable the group to explore the topic in greater depth. Everyone shares their stories and thoughts, and the group responds personally and openly to what they have heard. The format encourages the establishment of a safe, non-judgmental and non-competitive interaction among physicians. In expressing what makes medicine meaningful to them and receiving the appreciation and support of colleagues, physicians become strengthened in the very qualities they are seeking to restore to their professional lives and to medicine as a whole. Pilot data suggest that the program is highly effective in reversing physician depression and cynicism, and in restoring commitment and enthusiasm.

The following topics are examples of those that can be selected for discussion:

- * Survival skills for residents (sharing self-care strategies for stress reduction and physical, emotional, and spiritual nurturance)
- * Compassion and caring
- * Listening
- * Pain and suffering
- * Fear
- * Sharing grief and honoring loss
- * Dignity
- * Integrity
- * Humility
- * Forgiveness and mistakes (dealing with guilt, shame, and blame)
- * Gratitude
- * Allowing awe in medicine (mystery, wonder, and intuition)
- * Service, calling, and meaning in medicine