

# **Physician-Poet: Oxymoron or Necessity? How Creative Writing Can Make Physicians Better Doctors**



34th STFM Meeting

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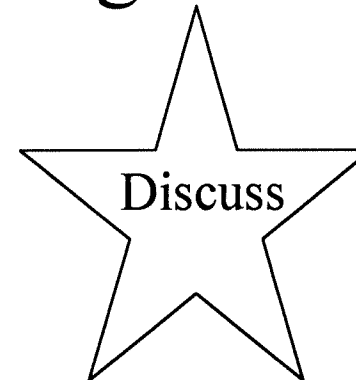
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# Workshop Agenda

- Introductions
- Writing as a Metaphor for Doctoring
- Theory and Concepts
- Writing Practice
- Uses of Writing in Teaching
- Discussion
- Wrap Up



# Writing as Healing

- **A Personal Story**
  - *Moses Lake*
- **Thought Suppression**
  - *Increase BP*
  - *Increase Coronary Artery Disease*
  - *Decrease Immune Functioning*

# Writing as Healing

## Writing as a Tool to Release Stressful Thoughts

### – Pennebaker Studies

- *Decrease visits to the doctor for college students*
- *Unemployed find jobs easier*
- *Decrease use of asthma and arthritis medicines*

# Writing vs. Sharing Thoughts

*(e.g. counseling and story telling)*

- **How are they the same?**
  - *Release of Stressful Ideas*
  - *Decrease chemical effects from inhibition*
- **How are they different?**
  - *Writing requires analysis -involving beginnings and ends*
  - *? Writing involves different area of brain than storytelling?*

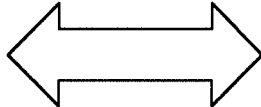
# Writing and Control

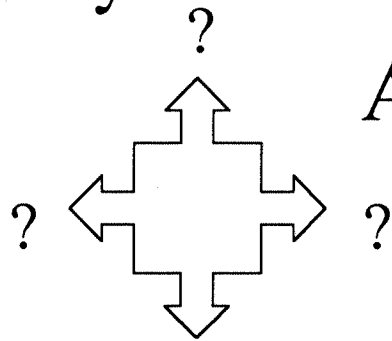
- Control and Certainty

- safety

- security

- authority

Yes  No



Ambiguity and Uncertainty

- creative space

- alternatives

- opens up possibilities for understanding

# Writing as Reflection

- Two Goals of Reflection
  - Steadiness
  - Tenderness

# Steadiness and Tenderness

- Steadiness
  - Close attention, curiosity
  - Presence (awake)
  - Mindfulness
- Tenderness
  - Compassionate hearing and seeing
  - Understanding point of view
  - Empathy



# Free-Form Writing

- Definition
  - Free writing on meaningful topics
- Technique
  - Brainstorm a list of possible subjects
  - Choose one and write without stopping
- Purpose
  - Time out to reflect on meaningful experiences
  - Connect with forgotten emotions, hearing others

# Point of View Writing

- Definition
  - Writing that adopts the patient’s point of view
- Technique
  - 10-12 min writing in 1st person voice (“I”)
  - Relates patient thoughts, feelings, perspectives on doctor-patient encounter, illness
- Purpose
  - To develop increased empathy
  - To decrease frustration
  - To develop new insights into patient management

# Mindful Writing

- Definition
  - Writing that seeks to combine a centered attitude with an intention of compassion and loving-kindness
- Technique
  - Preparatory: relaxation, meditation, prayer
  - 10-12 min writing in 2nd person voice (you)
  - Format: letter, imagined speech
- Purpose
  - Cultivate feelings of loving-kindness toward patients
  - Achieve greater understanding, resolution, forgiveness

# **Integrating Expressive/Creative Writing into Medical School Curriculum**

- Creative writing/projects
  - 3rd year Medicine & Pediatric clerkships
- Free-Form Writing
  - 2nd year Family Medicine residents
- Point of view writing
  - 1st & 2nd year Patient-Doctor courses
- Mindful writing
  - FNP students & Family Practice residents