

The origin story of the PMHA is intimately bound up in my own personal history. In 1997, I experienced a severe spontaneous retinal detachment. For a while it was unclear how much sight I would recover, and this brush with my own vulnerability left me feeling depressed and 0 help. Like a good scientist, I turned to the EBM literature on the causes and treatments for retinal detachment; and the psychological literature on the symbolic importance of sight. Yet I discovered that, in searching for a way to find meaning from and make sense of this experience, I was consoled not by the medical data nor social science findings, but, surprisingly, by poetry.

A friend had thoughtfully sent me a supply of Books on Tape, which included Emily Dickinson's musings on mortality and a collection of the physician William Carlos Williams' poetry and short stories about his encounters with patients. I listened to these works over and over, feeling that the "voices" in which they spoke were saying something profound. When I could read again, I continued this new pursuit, delving into literature and the arts to learn more about how patients experienced their illnesses and how doctors experienced their patients. I was in the grip of a passion.

Soon it was not enough to simply read great stories, I wanted to share this passion with others, especially with future doctors. In 1999 I obtained approval to teach a literature and medicine elective. The first patient stories/doctor stories class I ever taught started out with 3 medical students, two of whom disappeared after the first few weeks; so for the remainder of the 10 week session, it was just a student named Aparche Yang and me, reading and discussing poetry and personal narratives about doctors and patients and illness. I think we both had a good time. I know I did.

From this humble beginning, and with the support of my department of Family Medicine and the Office of Medical Education, as well as guidance from the few other medical humanities programs that then existed at other institutions, the program at UCI grew year by year to eventually have both required and elective curricula in all 4 years of medical school; to start the journal of arts and literature, Plexus and the annual Medical Student Art Exhibit; to build relationships with the School of Humanities, the School of the Arts, and the wonderful undergraduate club, Healing through Humanities with which the program did many community engagement projects; to involve medical students and undergraduates in humanities-related research opportunities; and to sponsor symposia, plays, poetry readings and other events that illuminated the intersection of medicine and the arts.

It was the ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus who observed that "From little seeds, a mighty trunk may grow." I marvel at how the PMHA grew over the years because of the incredible support of the current Dean of the School of Medicine, Dean Michael Stamos, and his predecessor Dean Ralph Clayman; physician colleagues in Family Medicine, including the current chair Dr. Cindy Haq who worked tirelessly to ensure that, even during a pandemic, the Endowed Chair didn't fall through the cracks and Dr. Tan Nguyen who co-taught with me for years and pioneered his own innovative medical humanities project at FHC-SA; as well as faculty in Medicine, Pediatrics, Emergency Medicine, PM&R and the Chao Cancer Center. It's fair to say that without the constant support of my husband, there would be no PMHA. Most important has been the support of medical students and undergraduates who courageously were often the first to recognize how much, as future physicians, they needed what the PMHA could offer: ways of nurturing and encouraging their critical minds and compassionate hearts. My own heart and mind are deeply moved when I see how the program has flourished under Dr. McMullin's leadership and how integrated it has become with the mission of Medical Education and the School of Medicine. I look forward to its continued bright future!