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55-Word Stories: Insight into Healthcare

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Abstract

Narrative medicine and health humanities focus on arts, ethics, and clinical practice. Many health education programs incorporate creative activities to facilitate learner self-awareness and insight. We include them to address programmatic themes of professional growth and translational science.

Keywords

knowledge translation, humanities

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Translational Science in Occupation

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55-Word Stories: Insight into Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

Narrative medicine and health humanities focus on arts, ethics, and clinical practice. Many health education programs incorporate creative activities to facilitate learner self-awareness and insight. We include them to address programmatic themes of professional growth and translational science.

55-Word Stories: Insight into Healthcare

A 55-word story is a creative writing form to describe a first-person event in healthcare. At the beginning of an entry-level occupational therapy educational program, I introduced first-year students to the format. I gave them printed guidelines (Fogarty, 2010) though mostly talked through the idea as part of health humanities learning. Their first step was to write a stream of consciousness narrative about a pivotal personal experience related to healthcare. I gave them 15 minutes of freewriting time, making no edits. They could write words and phrases without full sentences or formal syntax. Then they put their work away. Several weeks later, I asked students to spend 15 minutes untangling and reordering their thoughts. At the end of the semester, they returned to their work one last time to pare the story down to 55 words. The stories that follow were written as part of this activity and are reproduced with the authors' permission.

Worst Time of my Life

Tate Pfeifer

One day in the middle of November I went into the ER with tremendous headaches. After an MRI I was told that I had a tumor within my brain. Because of this, in January I had to have a brain surgery that ended up saving my life and is the reason I am in OT.

Trapped

Abbey Seevers

COVID. Silence.

Residents alone. I'm the only one they see. But they only see half of me.

I'm a monster. Gown. Mask. Shield. Gloves. That's all they see.

I smile big. They see it in my eyes. I stay positive.

Impossible situation. Everyone's scared. No one knows what to do.

But somehow I'm supposed to.

Impact

Jocelyn Anderson

Crash, bang, silence

I'm sixteen, she is seven

She fell out of the blue

Seconds feel like hours

I see in her eyes when she comes back

She doesn't know why she is on the ground

Seven years later

Seizures are just part of another day

Medications, surgeries, adaptations

A childhood changed

A passion developed

The Reflection

Simone Regnier

Sadness. An adored resident discharged.
No more laughs or conversations about music.
Sadness lingered, until moments of reflection.
The residents' progress was great. I had been part of the healing journey.
I smiled to myself although I would miss them.
Happiness for us both to enjoy, my passion and their excitement of a new start.

Deflated

Claire Vanderbeek

On August fifteenth, my lung collapsed, and no one knew.
I couldn't breathe so I went to the doctor, but she diagnosed me with costochondritis.
I went to the emergency room, but the doctor diagnosed me with bronchitis.
It was not until the next morning that I received the call and rushed to the hospital.

First Experience with Therapy

Austin Fernau

Basketball practice freshman year, lots of running, injured feet, can't perform hard to walk.
Trainer tapes ankles before practices, pain is unbearable, can't run shortly after. Trainer suggests PT, PT says stretch every day. Stretch every day, go to practice, pain returns. Weeks go by, pain comes back, can't walk, pain unbearable, stop basketball.

Just Being There

Shawn MacDonald

My most difficult client,
was also a great teacher.

Patience and positivity lead to a relationship
and trust.

Mom asked if I could support him through a test at school,
one that caused an EXPLOSION!

Anticipating another episode, we started;
and got through without a problem.

All I had to do was,
just be there.

Healing my Pain

Bailey Hein

I checked in the ER with pain in my stomach. Suffering for days.
Thanks birthday sushi.
My nurse came to draw blood and put in an IV.
He cracked a few jokes but left quickly. For a little while I felt better. His kind presence helped
heal me in a meaningful way.
Every interaction matters.

Birth Control

Hadley Milks

I went on birth control and Accutane when I was 15 because of acne. I had to see an older, biased female doctor. When I stated my reason for being there, she didn't believe me. She lectured about safe/unprotected sex like it was my reason. I was uncomfortable about seeing doctors for years.

I want to be different

Lydia Delkamiller

This semester I struggled with health.
No one gave me answers.
Prescribed medication that's worse for me.
I asked questions. I expressed doubt.
Still the doctor didn't listen and wouldn't work to find me an answer.
I felt ignored. Left to figure it out on my own.
I want to be different for my patients.

Read more about 55-word stories here:

Dryer, A.R., Mlambo, M.G., & Mapukata-Sondzaba, N.O., (2021). Medical students using the technique of 55-word stories to reflect on a 6-week rotation during the integrated primary care block. *African Journal of Health Professions Education*, 13(2), 135-140.

<https://doi.org/10.7196/AJHPE.2021.v13i2.1332>

Fogarty, C.T. (2010). Fifty-five word stories: "Small jewels" for personal reflection and teaching. *Family Medicine*, 42(6), 400–402.

Moss, S. (1998). *World's Shortest Stories*. Running Press Adult.