

*“Beyond the medical
record” –*

Creative writing
workshops for doctors

Presented by
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Beyond the medical record

- Series of 3 six hour creative writing workshops for doctors
- Part of research collaboration between NCGPT and Southern Cross university
- Conducted by Susan Bradley-Smith (poet and humanities academic) and Hilton Koppe (GP and medical educator)
- 12-15 participants per workshop



Workshop themes and objectives

- Theme 1: ***“Once upon a time...” - Medicine, literature and writing***
 - The role of stories in doctor-patient relationship
 - Stories of doctor’s experiences



Workshop themes and objectives

➤ Theme 2: ***“...and they all lived happily ever after.” - Writing for personal and professional development***

- Using creative writing as means of burn-out prevention
- Using creative writing as a tool to assist doctors in gaining deeper understanding of the impact of their work on their wellbeing



Workshop format

1. Pre-reading material to orient participants to the workshop experience
2. Practical writing exercises
3. Opportunity for participants to read their work
4. Facilitated discussions based on readings and writing exercises



Workshop evaluation – Chris Morgan and Lee Dunn Southern Cross University

1. Pre-workshop ‘fax-back’, to gauge expectations and motivations
2. Workshop focus groups, conducted as part of workshop
3. Feedback questionnaire, completed at conclusion of workshop
4. Participants’ reflections – submitted 6 weeks after workshops



Evaluation themes

1. *The urge to tell one's stories*

‘There are incredible stories we want to record and are not able to do justice to.’

‘When it comes to the profession we are very proficient at getting patient stories, but not our own. How do you go about it? I have no training in that.’



Evaluation themes

2. *“Writing our pain”*: Creative writing and professional wellbeing

‘We know there are a lot of miserable doctors. Burnt out. We talk a lot about ways you can manage, like doing less work. That is not a solution. We need to find ways to enjoy the work. **Courses like this might help you get out of it what you said you wanted from it (the profession) in the beginning.**’



Evaluation themes

2. *“Writing our pain”*: Creative writing and professional wellbeing

“Personal development is professional development!”

“Today I wrote about something I was angry about. It can help doctors to cope.”

“The written word has an awesome power to explore and express what we cannot easily articulate.”



Evaluation themes

3. *Finding new meaning in practice*

‘The workshop seems to have given me a fresh look on my profession. I feel a bit less isolated with concerns that I sometimes have. It is a great opportunity to share ideas and feelings among colleagues. This usually does not happen between fellow doctors as we are too busy in our jobs. We also do not want to bother each other on the assumption that the colleague might not be responsive to that issue or that we might stir up some personal issues he/she might have’



Evaluation themes

4. *A collegial experience*

‘One of the things that takes time to do is being truthful. It’s good to be with doctors because most of us will take a while to be able to tell the world what we really think. We come to it slowly before going outside this (doctors) group.’

‘Being a doctor is inhibiting – you can’t talk about it. The general public has a different experience than we do. This gave me a chance to do a workshop where we share common experiences among doctors’



Evaluation themes

5. Opportunities for ongoing support and participation

“Face to face workshop was great. Doctors would not be prepared to divulge the deeper stuff on-line”

“This was too brief”

“It should be no bigger Today a sense of trust was achieved and everyone participated”



Evaluation themes

6. The importance of appropriate facilitation

Participants enjoyed the combination of a medical facilitator, combined with an expert in creative writing processes. It was felt that this combination provided a very good balance to the program.



Participant insights regarding value of workshops

- to record seminal work experiences and the insights gained from them
- to pursue medicine as an 'art', not just a science
- to use writing a vehicle to alleviate stress and longer term prevention of burn-out.
- to improve written language skills (some participants did not have English as their first language)
- to develop creative writing as a hobby and creative outlet
- to publish as opportunities arise



Participant insights

“There is relief, release and hope in writing. We can write our raw emotions, we can disclose our fears, our agonies, our guilt and our doubts. We can connect with the past and converse with the future. We can link to the whole spectrum of human experience and gain comfort and support from shared experiences.....We know that somewhere out there, someone, sometime, will understand.”



Participant insights

Sunlight shimmered through the open verandah,
Carrying the siren call of the Lennox surf beyond.
Unseduced, we stayed in our stone hacienda,
Received our journals – debutants – as yet
unopened.

Pencils danced with the whiteness of their pages,
Tracing tales of our craft,
Sharing laughter and despair,
Disease and recovery,
Hope.



Thankyou

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