

What Are You Doing Creatively These Days?

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Science, or one's ability to think scientifically and to understand the science behind everyday life, became synonymous with intelligence during the 20th century. In keeping with this opinion, many consider Einstein to be the genius of the century. Medical education mirrored this intellectual trend with the 1910 publication of the Flexner Report, which emphasized a medical curriculum built on a strong foundation of basic sciences.

Now in the 21st century, creativity, as represented by the engagement of the human imagination, is emerging as equally important. In his immensely popular TED talk,¹ Ken Robinson argues that our education system turns out good workers rather than creative thinkers and that the mounting challenges of our world require human beings to reach their full creative potential. Medical education is embracing this trend by instituting programmatic changes that incorporate the sensibilities of the arts and humanities into medical school curricula. Discussion of the arts are being promoted in academic journals as, for instance, in the *Medicine and the Arts* section and cover art displayed on the front pages in this journal.

But what would it take to bring the notion of creativity into the everyday delivery of health care? To allow the human creative instinct to permeate health care delivery in such a way that practitioners could reach their full potential individually and collaboratively,

in both the daily practice of their profession and in their personal lives?

When encouraged and allowed to flourish, creativity, with its hallmark features of imaginative thinking linked with the spirit of inquiry, has been and will continue to be responsible for continuous breakthroughs in the practice of medicine. However, an important point not to be overlooked is that creativity can also allow us to be in touch with *ourselves*. In a special *Medicine and Creativity* issue of *The Lancet*,² various authors talked about creativity allowing for critical reflection and an integration of the physical, mental, psychological, and emotional self; about creativity facilitating the development of skills relating to touch and observation; about the nurturing of curiosity; and about the challenging of one's received views of the world. At the same time, sharing one's creative output with others encourages connection and relationship building and can allow a health care provider to connect with colleagues and individual patients in a spirit of shared understanding and appreciation.

I am sure we are all well aware of individual health care practitioners who engage with any number of a broad range of creative endeavors, including literature, music, stand-up comedy, clowning, drama, dance, visual art, garden design, sculpting, photography, and more. But creativity is not yet part of the vernacular of medicine in the way that science is. So, what would it take to make creativity part of the medical vernacular, become commonplace—the rule rather than the exception?

We could achieve widespread nurturing of creativity by encouraging talk of our creative endeavors to infiltrate the morning coffee and lunch conversations, the small talk that takes place in health care teams as they move between procedures or patients, the corridor talk, the proverbial “water cooler” conversations that touch on our lives

outside of the task at hand. Deans, department chairs, and other unit heads could promote this approach by bringing the question of what we are doing creatively to the forefront in their preemptory remarks when meeting with faculty or staff. Further nurturing of creativity could occur when we meet up at conferences or rounds, with casual questions, such as “What are you reading these days?” or “Have you listened to any good music lately?” or the simple question “What are you doing creatively these days?” Conference and rounds organizers could go one step further, incorporating appropriate speakers, workshops, or fieldtrips into their programs, such as the ones that occurred at the 2009 International Association for Medical Science Educators meeting in Leiden, The Netherlands, that offered an all-day workshop session that moved between an anatomy museum and an art museum, as well as a workshop on digital photography.

None less than the scientific genius of the last century, Einstein, pointed to the importance of the imagination in influencing his work, stating that “imagination is more important than knowledge,” and “when I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than any talent for abstract, positive thinking.”³ So, in linking imagination to the creative impulse, let me ask you, the reader, the question: “What are you doing creatively these days?”

References

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- 3 Isaacson W. Einstein: His Life and Universe. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster; 2008.

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