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Education Research

Poster Title

Increased Empathy as a Long-Term Effect of a Residency Writers' Workshop

Authors

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Abstract

Background:

Creative writing workshops in medical training generally aim to facilitate reflection, increase empathy, and teach trainees to understand the importance of a patient's story. Over the past 11 years, 130 residents from multiple specialties have participated in the annual Yale Internal Medicine Writer's Workshop. Participants submit a narrative and then participate in an intensive two-day workshop focused on the art and craft of writing. After the workshop, participants work on revisions with continued feedback, leading to a publication of the narratives, a public reading, and an invited grand rounds featuring a physician-writer. We hypothesized that the workshop has long-term effects on empathy, observation, and motivation to write.

Methods:

An online anonymous survey was sent to the 130 previous participants of the Yale Internal Medicine Writer's Workshop. Participants were asked to evaluate (via a 5 point Likert scale and qualitative text response) how the workshop influenced their empathy, observation skills, writing skills, and whether they were inspired to continue to write. Qualitative responses were open coded by study investigators to identify themes in resident responses.

Results:

Ninety former resident participants responded to the survey. The majority of residents agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop influenced their ability for careful observation (84%), ability to be empathic (66%), improved their writing (89%), and inspired them to keep writing informally (53%) and formally (67%). Respondents indicated that the workshop influenced their empathic response both towards patients as well as colleagues. Some noted that the workshop helped them to appreciate that each patient has a story, which encouraged them to be more empathic. One respondent noted: "By describing my patients' experiences in writing, I have increased the strength of my empathic self."

Conclusions:

Residents who participated in this writing workshop between one and eleven years ago described a long-term increase in their ability to be empathic with both patients and other physicians. The writing workshop also taught them to observe more carefully and improved self-reported writing skills. Many former workshop participants have continued to write, both formally and informally. Residency writing workshops focused on the craft of narrative may help to preserve and enhance empathy.

References

Not listed