

# Narrative Medicine in a Student-run Free Clinic: Promising Emotional Benefits for Health Professions Learners

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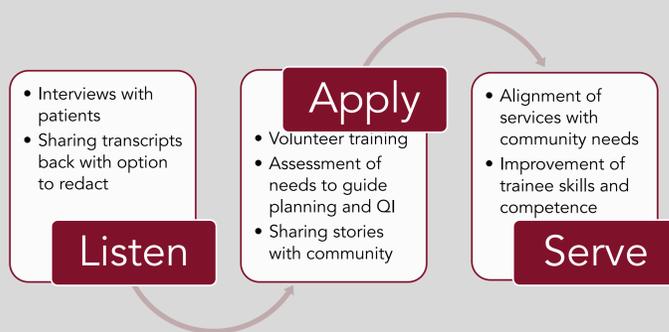
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## BACKGROUND

- The Phillips Neighborhood Clinic (PNC) is an student-run free clinic (SRFC) serving ~1,000 patients annually and engaging 13 interprofessional programs at the university.
- Narrative medicine** is an approach that centers the stories of patients, providers, and communities. This can take the form of storytelling, reflective writing, and other modes of expression – and may help foster empathy, communication skills, cultural competency, and patient-provider relationships.<sup>1,2</sup>
- In convening trainees and underserved patients into common settings for service learning and bidirectional communication, SRFCs may be opportune for narrative medicine approaches.<sup>3</sup>

## METHODS

- We conducted open-ended, private interviews with PNC patients eliciting stories about health, healthcare, or illness. Stories were transcribed and analyzed with multiple applications.



## 1 Emergent story themes illustrated patient needs and strengths.

Immigration and migration stories

"I think there is a good community because we are from varying countries – Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras... Together we make one grand family."

Healthcare experiences

"I have not had very good experiences going to see doctors with my children. Even though there are paid interpreters, I don't like how they act... They make us feel like we are uneducated and that we have accents."

Resilience through adversity

"I want to stay clean. I'm working on not being so hard on myself... I was sober, I was working, straightening out my life. But you know, that's when I relapsed."

Feeling misunderstood or not seen

"He unfortunately was mistreated by the nurses, being that he was a man of color, he was a Black man... it does cause you to feel nervous as a person of color to go into the hospital."

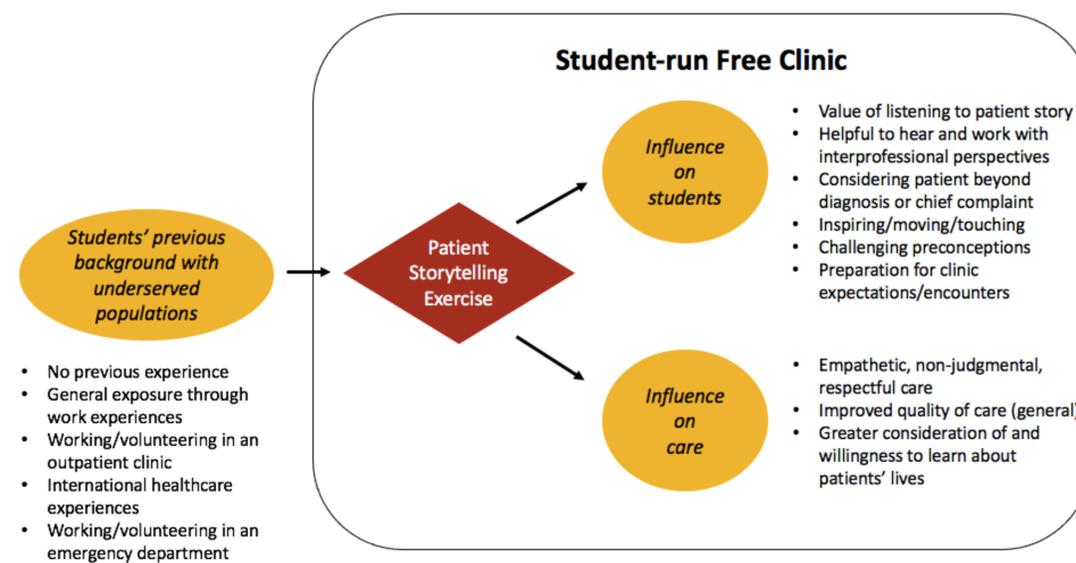
Perspectives on how stories can be used

"I like sharing because other people can learn about the immigrants who live in this country. By sharing, we can change the way that they view us, because many have no idea how or why we live here."

Therapeutic value of storytelling

"It was nice to talk about it, 'cause I never really talk about it. And because it is still painful that it occurred. The pain doesn't just go away."

## 2 Participating in an exercise centered on one patient's story influenced trainees and their approach to care.



## ADDITIONAL RESULTS

- The patient storytelling exercise improved trainees' (n=57) attitudes towards underserved populations, using a modified version of a validated survey, Health Professions Attitudes Towards the Underserved Instrument<sup>4</sup> (HPATHI; p<0.05).
- Nearly all trainees reported the patient storytelling exercise was high quality (93%) and that the clinic should incorporate additional similar efforts (89%).
- There was variability in exercise effectiveness by discipline, domains, and specific items of the HPATHI. While most/all items in the "social advocacy" and the "cynicism" domains improved, only 4 of 9 "personal advocacy" items improved.

## NEXT STEPS & IMPLICATIONS

- Thematic analysis of stories can elicit targets for quality improvement and discussions by student leaders and Community Advisory Board.
- Narrative medicine programs may be feasible for implementation within SRFCs and yield benefits for patients, trainees, and the organization overall.
- Patient storytelling exercises may help improve trainees' social advocacy and cynicism, with less impact on personal advocacy.
- Future work can assess the value of narrative medicine on larger samples of professionally and culturally diverse trainees, and employ more rigorous, longitudinal designs to evaluate impact.

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