

Applied Media in Palliative Care and Hospice

Michael Stillwater

"When you enter the room of your patient, put your hand on that doorknob, take a deep breath, and remember why you became a healer. What gave you meaning? Why did you jump through all those hoops? Through all that training?"

As the questions are spoken, music begins. At first barely perceptible, it gradually gains in audibility, underscoring a visualization that guides the listener into stillness.

"Take a moment. Remind yourself that you are there to serve that person. It's as if you take off your shoes to respect and honor what you will find inside."

The listener, a nurse practitioner taking a break between patients, breathes more slowly, her body relaxing. A few moments earlier she was both agitated and exhausted, but now she feels calmer, her sense of purpose reconnected.

The listener's experience illustrates a growing trend: the use of creative arts in healthcare settings. The speaker she hears is author, educator, and clinician Christina Puchalski, MD, founder and director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health. The music is by Emmy-award winning film composer, Gary Malkin, whose score for the recording *Graceful Passages: A Companion for Living and Dying* has become an integral part of end-of-life experience in homes and hospices across the nation. The entire audio recording is *Care for the Journey: Messages and Music for Sustaining the Heart of Healthcare*, the core of a practitioner-renewal initiative that joins the power of music with teachings for relieving stress and exercises for cultivating presence. Other speakers on the recording include Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, founder of Finding Meaning in Medicine; Jean Watson, PhD RN, author of *Theory of Human Caring*; Tom Lant, PhD RN, educator and originator of the Spirit of Care Givinig programs; Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu; and other distinguished educators.

The Care for the Journey program was developed in conjunction with a nationwide, interdisciplinary team of academic,



administrative, and clinical advisers through a grant from the Lloyd Symington Foundation and private donors.

Condensed, music-enriched tracks, most less than 5 minutes long, are designed for practitioners to use as inspirations and positive "reframers" between patients or while traveling to and from work, and for instructors to enrich presentations.

Healthcare professionals, patients, and families express appreciation for these inspiring pieces. Music, along with words spoken with a quality of presence, helps to:

- reduce psycho-spiritual pain
- create a harbor of relaxation
- provide a container for allowing and expressing feelings
- support meaningful conversations between patients and families
- support public conversations on subjects of meaning and medicine
- strengthen practitioner resilience and balance.

Another example of an applied arts approach is the book and audio resource *Graceful Passages: A Companion for Living and Dying*. *Graceful Passages* features music-enriched messages from speakers representing different faith traditions,

speaking inspirational messages to the dying, their loved ones and care providers. It also touches those of us who still imagine that death is a long way off.

Since its release in 2001, *Graceful Passages* has helped reduce patient fear and anxiety, support families finding peace, and assist physicians, nurses, social workers,

chaplains, and volunteers to deliver emotional and spiritual care to their patients. Often the music alone, without spoken messages, is cited as being particularly powerful in hospice and palliative settings.

Translating *Graceful Passages* into an educational tool, a visionary chaplain at the Hospice

of the Florida Suncoast, Jean Ledoux, designed a popular in-house training program that has helped thousands of volunteers. This program emphasizes both spiritual sensitivity with patients and the impact of this particular resource on the volunteer's own sense of presence and acceptance of their personal mortality. The training takes from a cross-cultural perspective, using music, song, narration, story, visual images and other creative expressions help to deeply engage the healing process, reflecting the arduous journey through illness while ultimately easing the passage of death itself.

In other programs, artists are developing new media in partnership with interdisciplinary teams of health professionals to better integrate the humanities with healthcare. Helping patients and families feel less fearful and more connected, these musical pieces can help professionals reconnect to the roots of their own sense of meaning and purpose. Cultivating greater presence, for which the arts are well suited, brings a practitioner's sense of spirituality into

each moment, regardless of professional role or faith approach, helping them better assess and respond to the nuances of emotional and spiritual concerns.

Despite the obvious impact of such programs, the arts, as a therapeutic intervention, still require evidence-based assessment. Demonstrating a positive outcome through well-designed research is just as necessary for a healthcare arts intervention as for a new pain-relieving drug. The more that research can help legitimize the use of the arts in hospice and palliative care, the more we will witness wider use, credibility, and funding of arts-related interventions.

As music and other arts are used more extensively in hospice and palliative care and validated through both usage and outcome studies, new possibilities for integration will emerge. Increased awareness, aesthetic enrichment, and pragmatic applications bring greater whole-person care to patients and families, delivered by practitioners whose own well-being is both encouraged and sustained.

Michael Stillwater is an inspirational educator who uses music for healing. Coauthor of Graceful Passages: A Companion for Living and Dying, and Care for the Journey: Messages and Music for Sustaining the Heart of Healthcare, he is creator of SongCare, which provides individual and team music for hospices and hospitals. An award-winning songwriter, performing artist, and speaker, he is a healthcare consultant on reducing emotional and spiritual stress, using music for cultivating presence, and developing a practice of integrative acceptance. He leads renewal programs for healthcare professionals and others, and resides in Northern California. He can be reached at michael@innerharmony.com: For more information visit www.careforthejourney.net.

Hospice Medical Director

Iredell County, NC is nestled between foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the shores of Lake Norman. Charlotte, Winston Salem and Hickory are less than an hour's drive. Statesville, a community of 25,000 people sits in the geographic center of the county. Mooresville another Iredell community is one of the fastest growing areas of the South, also known as Race City USA with strong connections to NASCAR.

Hospice and Palliative Care of Iredell County's (HPCIC) "patient comes first" philosophy has seen significant growth in recent years. HPCIC seeks a full time physician to serve as Hospice Medical Director for our Mooresville and Statesville offices and our nine (9) bed residential/inpatient Gordon Hospice House (GHH).

The physician will serve as Medical Director for the hospice home care teams, attending physician for GHH residents and establish and provide palliative care consults at local hospitals. Experience working directly with patients facing end of life and their caregivers, pain and symptom management, and hospice interdisciplinary team experience is required. Board Certification in Hospice and Palliative Medicine is preferred or must be attained within two years of employment. Competitive compensation and benefit package will be offered.

Interested candidates that wish to be considered should send CV to:

Ron D. Thompson, President/CEO
HPCIC

2347 Simonton Road
Statesville, NC 28625
Phone: 888-464-4673
Email: ront@hoic.org



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Eligibility requirements

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- at least 5 years of post-residency professional activity predominantly in hospice and/or palliative medicine
- registration and attendance at three or more AAHPM annual national meetings
- evidence of a commitment to scholarship in the field of hospice and/or palliative medicine, e.g., lectures, presentations, posters, exhibits, publications (papers, reviews, chapters, popular articles, letters-to-the-editor, editorials), audiovisual materials, or other forms of communication.

For detailed eligibility requirements, instructions for applying, and the fellowship application, go to www.aahpm.org/membership/fellows.html.

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