

Using Narrative Medicine To Transform Healthcare



Rita Charon
Professor of Medicine

CURRENT RESEARCH

Clinicians can improve patient care through narrative knowledge and skill

There is much dissatisfaction—from doctors, patients, and citizens—with the U.S. healthcare system. Dr. Rita Charon, Professor of Medicine at Columbia University, is using her research to demonstrate the power of narrative medicine methods to improve the training of healthcare professionals—doctors, nurses, social workers, administrators, therapists, and clerical persons—and thus improve the health of the patients they care for. A term coined by Dr. Charon, narrative medicine is a theory and practice in healthcare that implements powerful methods that re-dedicate clinicians to their callings, allowing them to creatively see, imagine, and wonder about all aspects of their patients' lives. This provides them the skills necessary to accurately understand what their patients are going through and provide them with the best treatment.

As a young doctor in residency, Dr. Charon soon realized in an epiphany that what her patients paid her to do was to listen very skillfully to their stories—and to the stories others told about them—and to cohere these often contradictory accounts of the patient's illness into something that helped her understand what to do for them. Dr. Charon is working to safeguard the tremendous gains that phenomenal science is producing, while improving patient care.

Her background as a writer helped Dr. Charon realize that we discover things when we write them down. By implementing narrative medicine, Dr. Charon gradually stopped interrupting patients and bombarding them with questions (i.e.: "What's your pain level on a scale of 1-10?"). The more she learned to read and listen to her patients, the more they would disclose to her, allowing her to make sense of their ailment in a way...

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AFFILIATION



Columbia University

EDUCATION

- M.D. 1978, Harvard Medical School
- Ph.D. in English, 1999, Columbia University

AWARDS

- John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, 2002-2003
- Outstanding Women Physicians Exhibit, National Library of Medicine/ National Institutes of Health, 2003
- Lynn Payer Achievement Award, American Academy on Communication in Healthcare, 2006
- Great Teacher Award, National Institutes of Health, 2007
- John Stearns Medal for Distinguished Contributions to Medicine, New York Academy of Medicine, 2011
- and 2 more...

RESEARCH AREAS

Health & Wellness, Wellness, Aging Research

FUNDING REQUEST

Your funding will help support the \$500,000 yearly outlay for the teaching and research of Dr. Charon's narrative medicine program. Help fund the costs for personnel, statistical and design consultations, clinical research, development of novel medical curriculum, and the training of interprofessional healthcare teams and colleagues world-wide. She and her team are already generating convincing evidence that narrative methods improve health care for patients and care-givers; fund Dr. Charon.