

# Founder Profile



The work of Jeremy Nobel, M.D., founder of the Foundation for Art & Healing (FAH), embodies in a most personal way the effort to enlist art and science in the relief of human suffering.

Jeremy, who is Board Certified in both Internal Medicine and Preventive Medicine, with Master's degrees in Epidemiology and Health Policy from the Harvard School of Public Health, where he serves on the adjunct faculty, is also a poet, a photographer, and a teacher—a practitioner of the humanities.

With the unique background and training required to bridge scientific and humanistic disciplines, he has contributed to significant explorations into how creative expression mitigates illness and enhances well-being. He has become a prominent advocate for creative engagement, ancillary to and integrated with traditional medical care, as a pathway to healing.

Jeremy has been writing poetry and taking photographs since high school and studied both arts in college. In medical school, as he encountered studies demonstrating that art plays an important role in healing, he realized that his artistic, scientific, and humanistic interests were

complementary. But he didn't know where that convergence would lead until he saw how people responded to the trauma of September 11, 2011, as they used creative expression to better manage the storm of emotions that overtook them. Building on his friendships within the arts community, where dancers, painters, and sculptors have long testified to the power of the creative process to heal body and mind, Jeremy embarked on a sustained exploration of the role of creative expression in healing.

His personal journey led to the creation of our Foundation, whose mission is to benefit people's lives by bridging science and the arts: to explore the relationship between health and creative expression through rigorous scientific research; to empower individuals, communities, and vulnerable populations coping with challenging conditions like trauma and chronic illness, through direct and innovative programs and tools; and to engage, inform, and inspire these populations and the ever-growing arts and healing community, building awareness through thought leadership, shared stories of "art and healing," and original creative works.

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## Medical Doctor, Poet, Photographer, Teacher, and Designer of Healthcare Improvement Programs

A poem Jeremy wrote as a young medical resident and subsequently published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* is called "Pain Workup." It includes the usual questions a doctor asks, and then reaches beyond to a healing offered by the imagination, by the gift of creative expression:

*Tell me about the pain.*

*Is it sharp or dull?*

*What brings it on?*

*What makes it go away?*

*. . .*

*Do you remember a time before birth  
when the*

*Rhythm of the universe was your second  
heartbeat?*

*Do you remember how green the grass  
used to be?*

*Do you remember a time when you  
remembered no pain?*

Jeremy's recent poetry reflects the latest focus of FAH—healing the trauma of domestic violence and the battlefield. His poem "SNAFU" begins with a description of a father coming at a child with a belt:

*Your mother cowering, and you trying to  
protect her*

*afraid that if she were killed, you would  
be next.*

The poem ends addressing that child, now a soldier returned from war:

*you keep*

*finding yourself with a loaded M-9 in your  
hand. . .*

*when you wake up and realize*

*you almost shot your kids when it was just  
squirrels on the roof.*



The Foundation for  
**Art & Healing**



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Jeremy has coauthored an important white paper on the research into art therapies that have proven helpful in healing warriors suffering from PTSD. He is designing programs and tools that veterans can use to begin engaging in their own creative work on the path to healing.

A main focus of FAH is the chronic illnesses that afflict 75% of the population at one time or another, such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Currently, to explore the effectiveness of an easily delivered creative arts intervention, FAH has developed a program of “creativity circles” with diabetes patients at Boston Medical Center, in collaboration with theatrical artist Robbie McCauley, who has had Type 1 diabetes since adolescence. Her one-woman play *Sugar* is recognized as a breakthrough in the expression of the complex emotions of patients with diabetes, particularly those in health disparity populations. Participants in the program are given tools and techniques to engage in supportive conversations with each other. Following this demonstration phase of the program and its evaluation—based on benchmarks tied to clinical indicators of improved physiologic and emotional health—the aim is to make its resources available through partnerships at the national level.

Jeremy says: “As we continue to explore the role of creative expression in the healing process, it’s also an important part of our mission to make it clear to people that the boundaries of creative expression are virtually limitless and extend beyond the traditional art forms of music, dance, visual arts, and literature to include culinary arts, sewing, gardening, and even storytelling.”

Jeremy’s conviction that creative arts expression should be available to benefit us in our daily lives was the impetus for FAH’s recent development of *Creativity/Health: A Thirty-Day Journey to a Fresh Perspective*. This unique collection of daily exercises employs creative arts expression to reduce stress and contribute to health and well-being. Once the core curriculum is developed and tested, it will be integrated into an interactive online offering accessible from anywhere and at any time—and at low cost.

Previous FAH initiatives have included a groundbreaking Roundtable that brought together leading minds in cardiac health, public health, and the arts for a dialogue focused on creative engagement as it affects positive cardiac health outcomes. FAH also initiated and supported creative arts-based relief efforts to assist survivors of Hurricane Sandy, the Sandy Hook tragedy, and the Boston marathon

bombings. Mindful of the need to expand awareness of the public health benefit of the arts in the academic world, Jeremy and coauthors published the peer-reviewed “The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature,” which aims to establish a foundation for continued investigation into engagement with the creative arts and health outcomes.

Apart from his work with FAH, Jeremy has been making significant contributions to healthcare improvement for the past 25 years. Accompanying his teaching and research in this critical arena, he has worked at developing ground-breaking information technology-based automated systems that reduce the risk of medical mishaps while also increasing access to high-quality care. You and your family may already have benefited from one of the healthcare management programs and electronic information systems he has helped design in collaboration with health plans, hospitals, and physicians. Think of him when you no longer have to fill out a paper form at your doctor’s office, or mistakes are avoided because important medical information is available to your doctor when she needs it. Whether in medicine or the arts, Jeremy’s efforts blend the best of science and the humanities to make a better world achievable and available for all.



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