The Proceedings of a Roundtable to Explore Opportunities

New York City, June 2009
Introduction

Heart disease is the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in the developed world. Changes in lifestyles and related risk factors are quickly making cardiovascular illnesses, including heart disease and stroke, the most prevalent illness burden worldwide. While enormous medical progress has been made in recent decades, a growing understanding of the intricate relationship between cardiovascular disease and the human experience represents an opportunity to reduce the prevalence of heart disease and the suffering it causes even further.

It has been shown, for example, that certain agitated emotional states are predictive of morbidity and mortality in patients with heart disease. Since much can be done to prevent psychological distress, it is reasonable to imagine that doing so could also attenuate heart disease and its consequences. It is also important to note that positive moods and attitudes also influence a person’s willingness to engage with non-psychological therapies including medication, diet, and exercise, all of which play an important role in preventing and managing heart disease.

What does this have to do with the creative arts, and why is it so timely for a Roundtable to discuss opportunities?

Interest in the relationship between the arts and healing has been building in the medical world. The Foundation for Art & Healing, founded in 2003 by Jeremy Nobel, MD, represents a focused and sustained initiative to explore the connection between creative modalities (art) and illness prevention and recovery (healing) through awareness-generating and research activities, while developing and disseminating effective programs that benefit communities and individuals.

The Arts and the Heart Campaign, orchestrated and led by the Foundation for Art & Healing, is a multiyear initiative with two primary components, the import and timeliness of both confirmed by attendees at the Roundtable event. The first component is a robust research agenda that establishes a framework for ongoing investigation as well as outlines key challenges related to research methodologies. The other component is the development of
targeted pilot programs within key subpopulations that can offer insight into what works well in actual field conditions and identify program characteristics and components vital to effectiveness and sustainability.

The Roundtable

The Arts and the Heart Roundtable, convened in June 2009, brought together twelve thought-leading experts whose professional backgrounds represent the arts, medicine, public health, and community outreach. Roundtable participants responded to this unique invitation, eager to contribute their experience and insight. Their enthusiasm also revealed a shared commitment to better understand the benefits of creative engagement in managing heart disease and to make those benefits systematically, effectively, and commonly available to individuals and communities worldwide.

Participants’ observations and recommendations, summarized in this report, will serve as the cornerstones of the Foundation’s efforts directed towards balancing and bridging the scientific basis for the practice of modern medicine with holistic and humanistic traditions.

Roundtable Participants

Robert N. Butler, MD
President and CEO, International Longevity Center-USA
Author, The Longevity Revolution: The Benefits and Challenges of Living a Long Life

Robert A. Gabbay, MD, PhD
Director of the Penn State Institute for Diabetes and Obesity; Professor of Medicine of the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine

Arnell J. Hinkle, RD, MPH
Executive Director, Community Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness (CANFIT)

Edward Hirsch
Poet, MacArthur Award Winner
President, Guggenheim Memorial Foundation

Harlan M. Krumholz, MD, SM
Harold H. Hines Jr. Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology and Public Health, Yale School of Medicine

Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH
President / Founder, Foundation for Art & Healing
Harvard School of Public Health

Laurel Pickering, MPH
Executive Director, New York Business Group on Health

Rita F. Redberg, MD, MSc, FACC
Professor of Medicine, Division of Cardiology, University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine

Jeri Rosenberg
Caregiver, Artist

Steven M. Safyer, MD
President and CEO, Montefiore Medical Center

Joshua Smyth, PhD
Professor of Psychology, Syracuse University

Victor J. Strecher, PhD, MPH
Professor and Director, Center for Health Communication Research, University of Michigan School of Public Health and Medicine
Founder and Chief Visionary Officer, HealthMedia, Inc., and Johnson & Johnson Co.

Awareness of the power the creative process has to heal body and mind is not new, as this quote from over two millennia ago so impressively reveals:

“O for mortals, what Power there is in songs, What greatest happiness That can make bearable this Short narrow channel of life!”

Sophocles, ca. 400 BC
Fitting into the “Big Picture” of Healthcare: The Time Is Right, and Heart Disease Is Only the Beginning

With its growing focus on advancements in technology, the practice of medicine has become increasingly impersonal. The system is at risk of turning doctors into biomedical technicians and patients into the summary of their lab tests and MRI scans. In addition to depersonalization, the U.S. healthcare system is also challenged by growing costs. Ironically, even as healthcare costs skyrocket, Americans are no healthier than people in other industrialized nations and are often quite dissatisfied with their care.

Healing-oriented creative engagement has the potential of humanizing the doctor-patient relationship and, by tapping into the deeper springs of patient motivation and healing, improving outcomes and patient attitudes. Engagement with these creative healing approaches and experiencing their benefits can be achieved in parallel to more traditional biomedical treatments and therapies, allowing patients to benefit from the best available on all fronts.

An explosion of research in the last 40 years has shown that psychosocial factors and emotional states affect our biological processes and can lead to or exacerbate illness. Numerous studies have confirmed that emotions can result in abnormal cardiac function and predict disease morbidity and mortality. Moreover, one important international investigation, known as the INTERHEART study, has demonstrated that the risk of heart disease in response to stress and other psychological factors is as great as from smoking.

In addition, more than 300 professional organizations have been studying and documenting the effects of many varieties of art interventions on emotional and physical healing. These studies provide evidence that as artistic activity explores and expresses emotions, the emotions are, in turn, channeled in ways that relieve suffering.

The artistic community is also exploring the healing powers of the creative process. Often based on their personal experience with illness, painters, dancers, sculptors, writers, and arts educators have come to realize the power of the creative process to heal body and mind.

Unfortunately, most people are often left on their own to develop important coping skills. Through the Arts and the Heart Campaign,

“Poetry (whose root is the Greek poesis or ‘making’) both reflects our own experience and transforms it. The activity of making something artistically is transformative but not entirely rational. Individuals take their obsession, grief, pain, and hope and try to turn it into something. This ‘making’ may not result in a cure but it is ultimately healing.”

Edward Hirsch
the Foundation for Art & Healing, with its many supporters, is in a unique position to draw equally upon the artistic community and the scientific community to synthesize the evidence being accumulated, collaborate to fill the gaps in our knowledge, and to productize and publicize the ways that art in its myriad forms – writing, painting, dance, music – provides another tool to relieve suffering.

And as important as heart disease is, it is only the beginning. The Arts and the Heart Campaign, by identifying and demonstrating the effectiveness of powerful and innovative approaches to the prevention and management of heart disease, will also lay the groundwork for the successful application of creative engagement techniques to a host of other illnesses and challenging human circumstances.

Roundtable Objectives

Objective One: Evaluating the Evidence That Creative Engagement Has Potential Healing Capability

One of the goals of the Roundtable was to review and assess current knowledge about the connection between the arts and heart disease, in part to justify continued efforts and in part to develop a plan for further investigative strategies. Participants discussed studies in the medical literature, heard personal testimonies offered by heart patients, and engaged with an insightful analysis drawn from literature, as to how creating or experiencing art can prove transformative.

It was generally agreed that within the investigatory realm, three types of evidence or perspectives provided support for incorporating the arts into patient care:

- The randomized clinical trial. Several randomized controlled trials (RCTs) have demonstrated the effectiveness of art in the healing process. However, the RCT should not be considered the sole standard when it comes to providing evidence of art’s healing potential.
- A humanistic or rational perspective. This approach relies on reasoning on the basis of all available evidence (not solely experimental trials). Numerous research studies document patients’ improved capacity to handle the burden of disease as a result of engaging in creative activity.

"If we can demonstrate that emotion affects outcomes and art affects emotion, then a logical path to better outcomes would involve more attention to engaging people in artistic pursuits."

Harlan Krumholz, MD, SM
The experiential perspective. First-person accounts of how creative expression has relieved anxiety and pain after a diagnosis provide testimony from patients. Patients have affirmed that when they felt illness derailing their lives, artistic activity imparted meaning and a sense of empowerment.

Investigations from the medical literature of patients with cardiovascular disease were presented and discussed, as they highlight the potential of creative engagement to improve outcomes. A few stood out:

- The INTERHEART study of thousands of people in 52 countries around the world found that psychological distress, stress, and depression pose as large or larger a risk of heart attack than hypertension or abdominal obesity.
- A study of heart patients’ drawings of the state of their hearts showed that patient perception is as good a prognosis of clinical outcomes three months later as traditional medical measures.
- Multiple studies of interventions showed that engaging in creative writing as a supplement to medical care reduces the impact of disease and improves quality of life.

Knowledge about the relationship between art and heart health, applied concurrently with traditional medical care, is benefiting many patients today. Evidence from medical studies, patients’ positive experiences with creative engagement, and the insights of working artists, all point to the healing powers of art that could be harnessed by patients and caregivers.

The Healing Power of the Imagination

Pablo Neruda explained how poetry can heal through conveying a sense of union with others: “To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses – that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being, and unites all living things.”

As one of the participants, Edward Hirsch, noted—“Poetry (whose root is the Greek poesis or ‘making’) both reflects our own experience and transforms it. The activity of making something artistically is
transformative but not entirely rational. Individuals take their obsession, grief, pain, and hope and try to turn it into something. This making may not result in a cure but it is ultimately healing.”

A patient’s mental model or representation of illness can be a potent determinant of both biological processes and behavior. Research is demonstrating how art can change mental models. It’s possible that creative expression can affect health by changing people’s representations of their health states.

**Objective Two: Exploring Gaps in Our Knowledge**

Roundtable participants recognized that while much is already known about art’s relation to healing and to heart disease in particular, there remain many unknowns in this powerful, seemingly mysterious connection. They discussed some of the areas that are ripe for the Foundation to explore further.

Participants agreed that the core questions are: What works and what matters? Of all the ways we can intervene, which are the ones that will make a substantial difference in patients’ lives and outcomes?

Art needs to be considered in all its different facets as it applies to medicine — as treatment, as a facilitator of treatment, and as a modifier of mood and acceptance of therapeutic strategies. Art also has the ability to create shared decision making and should be explored for how it can be used to improve the interpersonal relationship between doctor and patient.

Identified was the need to investigate the actual mechanisms and processes of healing that take place through creative expression. Inquiry should be a combination of both quantitative traditional medical research and qualitative work — what works for an individual.

The Foundation could bring together artists, which could be helpful in expanding the collective understanding by sharing the process of how they actually express themselves. Likewise, anthropologists and sociologists could provide insights into how other cultures have valued and integrated creative approaches to healing, which have been all but abandoned in our high-tech society.

“The purpose of this entire dialogue is to enrich the lives of individuals and communities. The challenge is to imagine the channels that reach individuals, recognizing the complexity of the question.”

Victor Strecher, PhD
Participants concluded that there is no dichotomy between wanting to understand the mechanism of how art leads to healing and wanting to find the interventions that work. As we ask about how it works, we really are asking: what are the specific kinds of interventions that work, for whom, under what circumstances and what are the costs and benefits of those interventions?

The participants also agreed that it would be quite possible to convene an array of researchers to better understand methodological challenges, establish a theory of measurement for demonstrating benefit from creative engagement, as well as establish a framework for a prioritized research agenda to guide further investigations into this important topic.

Objective Three: Identifying Opportunities, Obstacles, and Breakthrough Strategies

The third objective of the Roundtable was to explore ways to make what we already know about art and heart health accessible and useful to those in need of healing – initially, individuals with established disease or who are at high risk for disease – and to caregivers and other stakeholders.

Discussed was the basic challenge of the complexity of multiple art forms and individuals’ engagement in them. Not every patient confronted with heart surgery responds to poetry or wants to paint. Further challenges include how to take the necessary small steps to raise awareness of art and its connection to healing while envisioning revolutionary change to the system.

Clearly identified was the opportunity for the Arts and the Heart Campaign to build on work that is already being done, use the tools that are available, and promote the evidence that already exists to open people’s minds to the effectiveness of these approaches. For example, studies show that music can help people relax and can create a more humanistic environment in medical facilities. Further investigations have also shown that other interventions using expressive writing, visual arts, and movement have been effective and at low cost.

A key barrier identified by Roundtable participants is that current incentives in the healthcare system are not aligned with the aims of using art to ease suffering. More promising is the growing pay-for-performance movement, which focuses on rewarding treatment outcomes instead of
There are 17,000 employees working at Montefiore right now, who could probably benefit from this type of approach, not to mention the patients, families and communities we serve. There is no reason not to get started.

Steven M. Safyer, MD
Moving Forward

Breaking Through to Wider Acceptance and Uptake of Arts and the Heart

Ultimately, the Roundtable participants were in complete agreement that the Arts and the Heart Campaign faces real but surmountable challenges. They viewed the Roundtable activity and discussion as the tip of the iceberg, likely reflecting a deep receptivity and broad passion in the community at large; but there is still a lot to be done to clarify a path for moving forward effectively.

Moving the Arts and the Heart Campaign forward requires determining our objectives, priorities, and specific actions that will be taken over the next three years. Those range from creating a methodology to measure the effectiveness of the Campaign’s efforts, to setting up demonstration projects, securing funding, and building a narrative of patient involvement and benefit that will attract media coverage and help awareness to grow.

The Foundation is thankful to the Roundtable participants for their recommendations and prioritization on the following thoughts and considerations that, taken together, form a useful guide to further activities.

Market Research

The diversity of stakeholders for this Campaign, and their interests, must be better understood. In addition to the patient and the doctor, are stakeholders also the family, the neighbor, the colleague at work? What similar activities related to arts and heart health are already available and are stakeholders well served? What are the needs that are not being met?

Developing a Cutting-Edge Research Agenda

Among the challenges of pulling together a research agenda to investigate how arts and healing are connected, we are challenged by many different kinds of survey instruments in both the medical and social sciences literature. It may be necessary to narrow the focus of our investigation to several specific art forms. We must also take into account the complexity of individual response to various art forms. Nevertheless, the Roundtable participants were confident that a research agenda could be developed that would be a meaningful
contribution to the better understanding of Arts and the Heart opportunities.

Demonstration Projects

The Foundation intends to move forward with effective community outreach in the near future, building on what is already known without waiting for new knowledge. In addition to workplace engagement, the Roundtable also felt that older adults, children, women, and the economically disadvantaged would be appropriate populations in which to target early intervention efforts. To achieve this, the Foundation could partner with relevant stakeholder groups in each population subset, to design, deploy, and evaluate demonstration pilots and measure results that are relevant to both participants as well as stakeholder organizations.

Increasing Visibility

An awareness-generating campaign is critical to meeting our goals. While consumers, physicians, and foundations need to be made aware of our efforts, we will need to prioritize our outreach. One approach is to allow the consumer to accelerate the development of arts and healing by creating a clearinghouse of resource information that allows consumers with a heart problem or heart risk to access information on the benefits of creative engagement in the arts that could be helpful to them. Research and demonstration projects are important, but the Foundation also needs a narrative bolstered by simple stories, such as patients helping patients, in order to interest the media.

Onward!

The Arts and the Heart Campaign anticipates forming three committees, including Research, Program Development, and Communication, to further define and spearhead the action plan. These committees will integrate the learning from the Roundtable with further discussions and form an integrated agenda for 2010 activities. In addition, all participants recognized the need for resources to continue the campaign and have agreed to contribute thoughts and support towards that critical goal on an ongoing basis. Roundtable participants also expressed enthusiasm that ongoing planning and outreach activities, which engage all stakeholders and address their concerns related to heart disease, will provide important

“We have a great concept but unless we can ‘productize it’… to make it commonly available, simple to engage with, and reliably and consistently effective, we will fall short.”

Laurel Pickering, MPH
underpinning not only for the Arts and the Heart Campaign but for the Foundation’s wider efforts going forward.

In summary, the Arts and the Heart Campaign’s Roundtable convened in June 2009 to address how to make knowledge about the healing potential of creative engagement available to heart patients, caregivers, and other stakeholders. Roundtable participants discussed the current state of knowledge about the relationship between art and heart disease, the gaps in what is known, and outreach opportunities. Participants enthusiastically agreed – given the strong evidence of potential benefit — that further activity is warranted and outlined an action plan that includes additional research and outreach programs. Plans are underway to put the action plan in motion.

Dedication

Julia Strecher, a friend of the Foundation and participant at the Roundtable, passed away peacefully on March 2, 2010. She was 19 years old. Julia’s story was reported in *The Wall Street Journal* at the time of the Roundtable, highlighting how she used artistic expression as a source of strength while navigating her recovery after a second heart transplant. Julia also documented her experiences in an essay called “Winner’s Choice,” which she shared and discussed with others attending the Roundtable. We’ll miss the enthusiasm and insights she brought to our exploration of the connection between art and healing. Because of her invaluable and very personal contributions to our efforts, we dedicate these Roundtable Proceedings to her.

Acknowledgments

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The Foundation also offers grateful thanks to George Bennett, Jonathan Cohen, The Ludy Family Foundation, Tom Williams, and Maurice Kanbar, who participated as Founding Friends and inaugural sponsors of the Roundtable and the Arts and the Heart Campaign.

“IT'S ALWAYS AMAZING TO ME TO HEAR THAT SOMEONE THINKS I'M STRONG BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE THE ONLY THING I'M DOING IS TRYING TO LIVE MY LIFE. AS I SEE IT, CHALLENGES ARE A PART OF LIFE FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL. IF CONQUERING THOSE CHALLENGES DAY BY DAY MAKES A PERSON STRONG, THEN A LOT MORE PEOPLE AREN'T GETTING CREDIT.”

**Julia Strecher (1990-2010), Heart Transplant Patient, Roundtable Participant**