

Introduction to the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation*

By Sarah R. Blanton, PT, DPT, NCS, Editor-in-Chief
Division of Physical Therapy, Emory University School of Medicine

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation (JHR)*.

JHR is a multimedia, open-access journal designed to encourage dialogue among rehabilitation professionals, patients, families and caregivers as we strive to explore the impact of illness and disability and efforts to promote health and recovery. The purpose of this journal is to provide a venue for scholarly discourse on the health humanities to raise the consciousness and deepen our understanding of the humanistic dimensions in the rehabilitation sciences. We seek to support a broad range of authors (faculty, students, researchers, clinicians, and general public) in publishing scholarly peer-reviewed papers and artistic works on topics that advance the visibility, understanding and delivery of rehabilitation. While conceived initially by physical therapy educators, the overarching vision of *JHR* is one of interdisciplinary collaboration. The study of humanities offers a rich opportunity to explore the shared experience of the interpersonal relationship common to all disciplines, and provides a foundation to delve deeply into our collective search to better understand the human condition. Furthermore, that exploration is a one-sided conversation if we do not sincerely listen to the voice of those we serve: our

patients and their caregivers/families. *JHR* seeks to create a unique platform to engage patients, to hear the stories of their journeys, and to learn from their perspectives in a new manner. Art and literature, music and poetry, all provide avenues to truly listen to each other as we grapple for meaning in the face of disability and suffering, rehabilitation and healing.

Content in *JHR* is organized into several categories of submissions: perspectives articles, research reports, narrative reflections, essays, conference presentations, poetry, visual arts, performing arts, media reviews, editorials, and historical perspectives in art. Patient, caregiver and family reflections include contributions spanning written narratives, poetry, visual and performing arts. Finally, we welcome letters to the editor. Explanations for each of these content areas can be found under the *Submission Guidelines-Publication Types* tab. While this is our “inaugural” issue, we have a rolling submissions model, and expect to publish three to six articles quarterly.

In an effort to reduce price barriers, *JHR* was developed as an open-access journal, without charge to both readers and authors. The online-only format allows for both a significant reduction in costs and a much greater opportunity to incorporate multi-media

submissions that encompass a broad range of artistic formats. For example, in sharing of Mr. Dick Taylor's poem "Ode to a Stroke," we not only read his writing, but we actually hear him recite his work and then listen as he further reflects upon the experience of using poetry to express the challenge of confronting a life-changing illness. By embracing digital humanities as a platform for *JHR*, we capitalize on contemporary technology to further traditional humanistic inquiry while expanding access for information dissemination.

Although we support submissions from multiple stakeholders, we will hold true to the rigor of the peer-review process and are committed to maintaining high standards for this publication. Such a spectrum of content demands a complex review process to maintain standards of scholarship, while supporting the creative process and providing a clear voice to clinician and patient, professional and student, artist and therapist. Hence, we will continue to build a broad spectrum of consultants and reviewers with strong qualifications to assess the content we publish. Employing a unique publication model, we anticipate growing and learning as we move along this journey and we encourage our readers to do so as well. Formation of a new journal is a dynamic process and our vision for this publication will be responsive to our readers' needs and shaped by our contributors' ideas.

For this inaugural issue, we are very humbled and honored to have both Dr. Ruth Purtilo and Dr. Rita Charon share their perspectives on the importance of humanities in rehabilitation sciences. Their endorsement of the timely and critical role of a humanities journal effectively propels us forward with a sense of confidence in our purpose. Dr. Purtilo, with her wise and long-held leadership in physical

therapy, so eloquently notes: "[s]pringing from our beginnings of 'setting rehab goals' *for* the other, what has sprouted is the realization that our success ultimately depends on engaging a deeply human involvement *with* the other" and the humanities provide guidance to cultivate that connection. Dr. Charon, who has pioneered the study of narrative medicine, generously provides an interdisciplinary perspective that powerfully underscores the concept that humanities are "[f]ull partners in the restoration of health. Merry Lynn Morris, MFA provides an inspiring example of this restorative role of humanities in the performing arts as she describes her journey in the development of the innovative Rolling Dance/Mobility Chair project.

The power of poetry surfaces from several authors' perspectives. Dr. Amy Haddad, currently the President-Elect for the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities and a published poet, shares her poem "At Rehab." Her words and her reflection remind us of the door poetry opens to truly understanding others. Dr. Marilyn McEntyre further expands on the impact of poetry for patients in her book, "Patient Poets: Illness from the Inside Out." She gently encourages us to explore the valuable information we can learn from patient poems not gleaned from our typical clinical evaluation. A potent example of this insight is evident in Mr. Dick Taylor's poignant reflection on his experience of suffering a stroke. Certainly no standardized outcome measure could reveal the depths of his emotions like the words of his poem, which allow us an intimate view into his true struggles.

Clinician and student narratives, media reviews and historical perspectives category round out the rest of *JHR* content. Narrative writing adopts a prominent place in *JHR*, and Dr. Bruce Greenfield shares his

experience of incorporating this approach with his students to promote reflection and to build skills of reflexivity throughout the Emory Doctor of Physical Therapy curricula. Media reviews are intended to include critical evaluations of books, film, music, or art that relate to the human experience of rehabilitation sciences. Katherine Voorhorst's review of *Murderball*, including a special interview with the film's director, gives us a sense of the film's impact on the public's awareness of wheelchair sports and provides insights into the use of the film as a tool for teaching. Dovetailing nicely to this review, physical therapist Sarah Caston builds upon the *Murderball* theme to share an intimate and deep reflection on her experiences with this patient population and her own personal evolution in this challenging area of practice. Physical therapy students Bekka Crockett, Allison Nogi and Keenan Whitesides, provide thoughtful narratives emerging from their clinical experiences and the lessons they have learned from their patients. Finally, the Historical Perspectives in Art section provides an introduction to a classic artist (painter, sculpture or photographer) whose work may reflect a study of human body and movement, confrontation with disease or other aspects of the human condition. For our first example, we chose one of the most

influential artists in American history, Thomas Eakins. A realist painter, photographer, sculptor and fine arts educator, he is known for his in-depth study of the body in motion.

If you are interested in submitting your work to *JHR*, please review our *Submission Guidelines* and *Frequently Asked Questions* sections. If you are considering being a reviewer, please contact Dr. Sarah Blanton: follow the *Contact* link, indicate the content area you are interested in reviewing and attach your CV.

As we embark upon this exciting journey together, may we do so inspired by Dr. Purtilo's insightful words:

We are suggesting that we are part of something much bigger than advancing an individual patient's well-being, or the well-being of our profession, or even the well-being of the professions working together as interprofessional teams. We are participants in the Big Stories of goodness-making, the narratives that instruct how all of us humans can thrive.

Sarah Blanton, PT, DPT, NCS
Editor-in-Chief

Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation