

Cultivating Vulnerability

By Sarah Blanton, PT, DPT

“I cannot find a single example of courage, moral courage, spiritual courage, leadership courage, relational courage...that was not born completely of vulnerability.” Brené Brown, [OnBeing Project interview](#) with Krista Tippett, February 8, 2018.

In her essay featured in this issue, “Returning Back to Oneself: Cultivating Vulnerability in the Health Professions,”

Nicole Piemonte, PhD reflects on her book, *Afflicted: How Vulnerability Can Heal Medical Education and Practice*. Using philosophers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as guides, Piemonte seeks to explore why many clinicians experience a “crisis of meaning” in their work. With the primary focus of healthcare education on biologic intervention, topics of vulnerability and the lived experience of suffering are largely minimized, if not absent. Piemonte calls for us to create a learning environment that recognizes vulnerability as a means to cultivate the courage to authentically engage with human suffering.

What does that mean, what does that look like, to create an educational environment that fosters vulnerability? As Piemonte notes, this learning space is one that encourages reflection on clinical and personal

experiences to cultivate qualities of humility, mindfulness, and compassion. How well do we embrace that discomfort inherent in recognizing our own potential for suffering as clinicians, and what lessons lie ripe within that awareness? As Brené Brown (quoted above) has discovered in her research, the courage to engage in deep reflection begins with personal vulnerability.

The humanities offer sage lodestars—from philosophical study to narrative reflective writing—to address the existential questions that may arise during each of our journeys. Perhaps as we end each day in the classroom or clinic, we should reflect on questions not just of what we did well, where we could improve, but also, “When was I vulnerable today? How was I brave?” Sometimes small shifts in perspective can cultivate strong habits that breed authenticity and moral courage, thus strengthening both our personal and clinical skills.

In our second installment of our “Profiles in Professionalism” series, we interview Gail Jensen, PT, PhD, FAPTA, FNAP, dean of the Graduate School and vice provost for Learning and Assessment at Creighton University. Recognized internationally for her scholarship in expert clinical practice, professional ethics, and interprofessional

education, Jensen explores the meaning of professional identity and the ways we can use the humanities to strengthen professionalism in the field of physical therapy.

From our Critical Perspectives section editors and colleagues, we reprint a guest editorial from *Physiotherapy Canada* (Fall, 2018): “Infusing Rehabilitation With Critical Research and Scholarship: A Call to Action.”⁴ The essay serves as a “call for rehabilitation journals to recognize, welcome, seek out, and publish submissions in this exciting area of research and thereby lead the field in promoting a new understanding of rehabilitation’s purpose, goals, practices, and outcomes.”^{p.301} The *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation (JHR)* joins the small number of rehabilitation journals that currently publish critical research and are intentional about creating a framework to support this type of work by involving critical scholars as part of its editorial and review processes. We hope this work provides a rigorous model for other journals to follow suit.

The Spring 2019 Issue of *JHR* also features these groundbreaking articles, poetry, and essays:

- **Historical Perspectives in Art**—Physical Therapy at Bath War Hospital: Rehabilitation and Its Links to WWI. Heide Pöstges, MSc, PT explores the accelerated development of rehabilitation medicine during the First World War (WWI), through the artwork of British painter E. Horton. In the painting, “Physical Therapy at Bath War Hospital,” Horton depicts one of the very first physiotherapy departments in England. As Pöstges analyzes the painting in its historical context, we are given a new perspective into the socio-

political-economic aspects of the evolution of physical therapy.

- **Alzheimer’s Disease and Emotions: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Film *Still Alice*.** Using a unique approach to media review, Sean Halpin, MA and Sarah Caston, PT, DPT provide a deeper qualitative analysis of the film *Still Alice* to gain insights into the psychosocial factors that interweave to impact emotions in individuals with cognitive impairment and their families.
- **Using Critical Reflexivity to Enhance Clinical Care: A Clinician Perspective.** In the Critical Research and Perspectives section, Jenny Setchell, PhD, BSc(PT) and Blythe Dalziel, MScPT illustrate the process of critical reflexivity to examine values and assumptions that underpin clinical practice.
- **Reflections on Early Attempts to Provide Pain Neuroscience Education in Conjunction With Biopsychosocial Care From the Patient and Interprofessional Team Perspectives.** Through narrative reflection, Marc Broberg, PT, MSPT, MA joins with interprofessional colleagues Benjamin Boyd, PT, DPTSc and Tamara Becker, MS, CCC-SLP to illustrate an example of a humanistic, person-centered approach to the treatment of pain through a biopsychosocial framework.
- **Stone Tongue, a Poem.** Florinda Flores, MFA shares her compelling story of a mother's experience of dealing with her son's 3-year speech delay.

Winner of the CHEP-*JHR* Essay Contest

Congratulations to Emory University Doctor of Physical Therapy Program graduate student Amanda Sharp, the winner of the physical therapy student essay contest co-sponsored by the ACAPT Consortium for the Humanities, Ethics, and Professionalism (CHEP) and *JHR*! This writing competition is designed to encourage deep thinking by students about the role and value of humanities, ethics, and professionalism in academic training and professional life. The second in an annual series, the CHEP-*JHR* essay contest offers a creative opportunity to ignite critical reflection in PT students across the nation, to support holistic approaches to patient care. This year's prompt addressed the often perplexing and difficult situations in clinical care where we are pressed to make value judgements of what is right or wrong, or good or bad. Students were asked to write about a clinical situation or experience that contained an ethical issue that was unsettling, or may have resulted in making an ethical judgment, detailing their thoughts, feelings, and responses. In her essay, "Goodbye, With Love," Ms. Sharp reflects on lessons learned from her hospice experience with her grandfather as she seeks new insights and understandings during a challenging clinical rotation. Essays from the two additional finalists, Mercedes Aguirre and Jake Raecker, will be published in the Fall 2019 issue of *JHR*.

Introduction to the Student Ambassador Program

We are introducing our new [Student Ambassador Program](#) to engage students from across disciplines and academic programs to be more involved with *JHR*. Each Ambassador will host educational sessions about *JHR* with colleagues in their program, and develop humanities-based events for their classmates (eg,

movie screenings, exploring concepts of disability at a local art museum, hosting book clubs). Our first Ambassadors are Amy Samuelson and Tom Myers, from Creighton University! Welcome! We encourage all students interested in participating to send an informational inquiry to us [link: <https://www.jhrehab.org/graduate-student-ambassador-program/>]

New Editorial Board Member

We are honored to welcome Fiona Jones, PhD, professor of Rehabilitation Research at St. George's University of London and Kingston University, and the founder and CEO of *Bridges Self-Management*. Professor Jones brings to the board her experience as past editor of *Physiotherapy Research International*. An accomplished researcher, she has received the Life after Stroke award for excellence from the UK Stroke Association, served as president of the UK Association of Physiotherapists in Neurology from 2013 to 2017, is a fellow of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, and received The Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to stroke rehabilitation in the Queen's Birthday Honors, 2017.

Partnering With Business to Re-Imagine Humanism in Rehabilitation

Finally, we would like to welcome our first corporate sponsors, PtPal (Naveen Khan, CEO), and the National Registry of Rehabilitation Technology Supplies (Weesie Walker, ATP/SMS, Executive Director). *JHR* has adopted an innovative publishing model providing our content at no cost to subscribers and authors. This unique approach allows accessibility internationally and across scholarly disciplines while also enabling us to connect more fully with the individuals and families we serve as rehabilitation

professionals. We are grateful for the generous support of our corporate sponsors that promotes our sustainability and helps extend the outreach of the journal. We seek to partner with businesses who adopt a corporate mission to foster humanism, and who have a broad vision of their role in supporting societal well-being.

Thank you for joining us. We hope you enjoy the Spring 2019 issue of *JHR*.

If you are interested in submitting your work to *JHR*,

please review our [Submission Guidelines](#). 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.

References

1. Setchell J, Nicholls DA, Wilson N, Gibson BE. Infusing rehabilitation with critical research and scholarship: a call to action. *Physiother Canada*. 2018;70(4):301-302. doi:10.3138/ptc.70.4.gee

About the Author



Dr. Sarah Blanton is an Associate Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine, Division of Physical Therapy. She graduated from the University of Virginia in 1987 with a BA degree in biology, from Emory University in 1992 with her masters in physical therapy and received her clinical doctorate in physical therapy in 2003. She has a specialty certification in Neurology through the American Board of Physical Therapy. After nine years working in neurologic rehabilitation at Emory Center for Rehabilitation Medicine, she served as project coordinator for several research studies, including two multi-site, NIH-funded national clinical trials. In 2006, Dr. Blanton joined the faculty of the Emory Doctor of Physical Therapy program and her teaching has included geriatrics, mental health, cultural diversity and neurorehabilitation. Dr. Blanton's current research focus includes stroke survivor and family quality of life, including depression, fatigue, caregiver/family functioning and post-stroke education. The long-term goals of her research efforts are to develop methods to support family focused rehabilitation approaches that facilitate the active integration of the caregiver throughout physical therapy practice.

Dr. Blanton's interest in the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation* stems from her ongoing exploration of the intersections of creativity and spirituality to gain insight into the human experience of suffering, joy and mystery. In her teaching, she has found the use of narrative to be an exceptionally powerful tool to foster reflection and personal insight for both students and patients. In her research, she is incorporating multi-media formats to develop family education interventions in the home environment. A photographer since childhood, she has enjoyed sharing her artwork through exhibits at Emory University, speaking with chaplaincy students on "Reflections of Art and Spirituality in Appalachia" and as a guest contributor to the Public Radio show, *On Being*.