

## Event

### Invitation, not prescription

With a system driven by cost-benefit analyses and a scientific evidence base, where do the humanities fit into health care? Can the benefits of humanities-based models be measured using current outcome scales? As Bella Eacott from performance company Clod Ensemble asks, “Can we work within the paradigm whilst re-writing the paradigm?”

On May 17, 2016, health-care professionals gathered to hear about the Circle of Care framework, which articulates “a tangible set of skills to help navigate the complexities and challenges of our health-care systems”. Suzy Wilson, Artistic Director of Clod Ensemble, described the project as a way to “catalyse refreshment, renewal, and regeneration”, to “melt some polarised ways of thinking”, and “to develop strategies [for healthcare] that are more connected, more sustainable, and healthier.”

Circle of Care has been developed by Clod Ensemble and the Simulation and Interactive Learning Centre (Sall) at Guy’s and St Thomas’ Hospital, funded by Guy’s and St Thomas’ Charity. It builds on a professional development programme running over 3 years, which has been addressing care and compassion in the NHS workforce. The collaboration, now running for more than 20 months, has, according to the press release, “delivered arts-based courses for health-care practitioners across the Trust including nurses, doctors, administrators, porters and receptionists—as well as a series of public events open to all, attended by both healthcare professionals and artists”.

Circle of Care is a map, at once simple and deeply complex: a descriptive paradigm in which health-care systems could, ideally, function. Circle of Care is for health-care professionals, their patients, and their employers, though, in reality, it promotes a set of skills and ideas that would help any enterprise function more effectively.

In a series of interviews with staff at Guy’s and St Thomas’ Hospital, Wilson and Peter Jaye (Director of Sall) found that “within health care, care and compassion was often spoken about as something that the health-care professional must give to or feel for the patient, but rarely were other people within the working environment mentioned”.

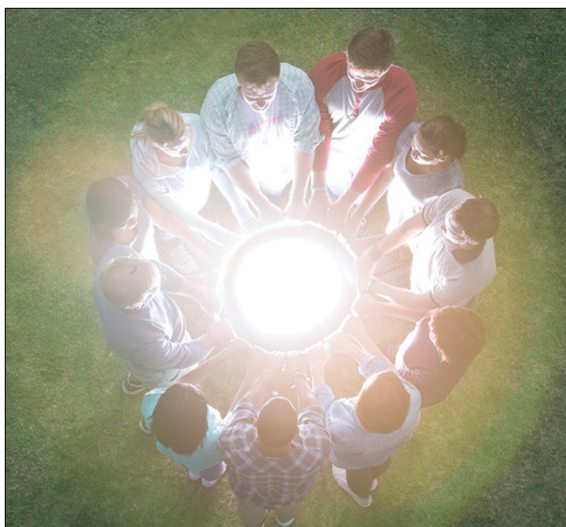
The key to their proposal is its interpersonal, multidirectional flow. Care is not described as unidirectional, from doctor to patient. Rather, to work effectively, care must be reciprocal for each individual in a health-care system, including doctors, patients, and other professionals. The skills compass, consisting of nine non-technical skills, supports a framework of care like spokes on a bicycle wheel, providing points of resilience for individuals within the framework. Some of these skills include non-verbal communication, teamwork, and self care.

This proposal has grown out of Clod Ensemble’s highly respected Performing Medicine programme, which teaches medical professionals skills from arts backgrounds. Non-verbal communication can be brought alive through movement workshops, taught by dancers or actors, to help health-care professionals understand how their postures and gestures might affect patients emotionally. Eye contact, tone of voice, teamwork, and engagement with personal stress are all covered by Performing Medicine workshops.

Resilience and self care directly affect quality and sustainability in health-care settings. As one health-care professional is quoted in the Performing Medicine literature: “In order to look after my patients well, I must look after myself properly.”

Humanities philosophy and methodology is increasingly considered not only a valuable, but also an essential, component of health and medicine. A great strength of this proposal is that it links the humanities paradigm to the medical. However, an ideal paradigm could be dismissed as idealistic. The perfectly flowing system depicted in Circle of Care’s illustrative animation seems too good to be true. But we dismiss it at our peril. The point is that improvements can be made step by step. One small change can catalyse a great response and this can happen from day one, when new medical students walk into the room. Decisions made now about the education of medical students will affect how we are all treated in the coming decades. Ask yourself: along with the necessary medical skills, how articulate, compassionate, and emotionally capable do you want the doctor looking after you to be?

*Kelley Swain*



For the Circle of Care animation see <https://vimeo.com/166819236>