

SLSAeu Conference 2017
Friday, 23 June, 4:30-6:30

Ssh. Quiet Please! Artists at work in this hospital zone

Presenters:

Margaret McAllister, Professor of Nursing, CQ University Australia;
Donna Lee Brien, Professor of Creative Writing, CQ University Australia;
Benny Goodman, Lecturer in Health Studies, Plymouth University UK;
Nicola Demonte, Lecturer in Psychology, Saint Xavier University, Chicago, USA.

There is widespread concern generated from reports of failings in care within health, particularly in the ongoing health inequities, that leave populations marginalised and suffering. The facts of health and social inequalities as a public health issue underscores the need for empathy at community and population levels.

Yet, pervasive and overlapping neo-liberalist and deficit-focused discourses have led health-care workers and their educators to concentrate their focus at the individual level. In this discourse a dualistic ontology prevails, where subject/object are seen as separate and not intertwined. Here the health care worker is not/never a patient, is not/never suffering, is not/never abnormal - the patient is - despite what visceral or moral intuitions might tell us. Instead of feeling connection, empathy and solidarity with groups' vulnerabilities or concerns, health care workers are set up to see themselves as separate and to unwittingly become complicit in the status quo. By only developing skills linked to technology and treatment, health workers are ill-equipped to participate in decisions to engender change and systemic reform with vulnerable communities in which they are, or will be engaged.

To better equip health professionals, learners require new language and skills to contextualise and critique experiences with vulnerable people, including themselves. This roundtable workshop explores the potential, place and power of art in advancing this goal.

As Maxine Greene, the artist and educator once said, "encounters with the arts can provide powerful opportunities for confronting the blandness of life and imagining a different world a more humane social order."

Our round table invites discussion of completed, planned and envisioned projects that lead students/practitioners into explorations of health, suffering, isolation, and human need illuminated through the study of music, poetry, fiction and non-fiction, and the visual arts.

Guiding questions:

- What emotions are awakened in the use of these artistic forms that are required in health care practice?
- What alternative stories are conveyed through artistic modes?
- How can art be linked to action?