

Evaluating The Use Of Narratives In Medicine As A Possible Outlet Of Expression For Physicians Suffering With Moral Injury

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Introduction and Objectives: Physicians are on the frontlines of healthcare, especially today with the surging cases of COVID 19. They are often compared to soldiers fighting a virus. They, like soldiers, also suffer with moral injuries. The term “Moral Injury,” originally used in the context of warfare, refers to the invisible wounds suffered by healthcare workers while making decisions that directly or indirectly impact the lives of their patients, such as deciding who would be prioritized for a specific treatment. The COVID 19 pandemic has amplified such injuries today. This research project seek to understand if narrative medicine, a branch of medicine focusing on a patients and practitioner’s personal portrayal of their stories in a clinical setting, can aid in the portrayal of a healthcare provider’s experience with moral injury.

Methodology: Examples analyzed in detail in this research project come from qualitative data analysis of essays published in the “A Piece of My Mind” series from JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association). This is meant to provide perspectives on how practitioners use narrative medicine to reflect on their experiences and exceptions in practicing medicine while also making their readers aware about their personal stories. This project will also heavily rely on the literature reviews from past studies on the impact of moral injury on healthcare providers and the efficacy of narrative medicine in helping physician make ethical decisions.

Conclusion and Possible Solutions: Expressive writing can be a tool to reveal hidden emotions, experiences, and thoughts that may impact an individual’s mental and physical health in the long run. For physicians, it can be a tool to voice important experiences and perspectives. Based on past research studies and the current use of narrative in medicine, employing story-telling as a means to express moral injuries may be helpful in relieving the moral stress experienced by some healthcare providers. However, there are limitations, in that conscience and morals are very intimate experiences and practitioners may not prefer such a written form of communication.

This project is currently in it’s data analysis stage with themes still emerging and being finalized. It is set to be completed by January 10th.