

2011 International Symposium on Poetry and Medicine

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Medical Teaching Centre, University of Warwick

ABSTRACT – SUE SPENCER



Stopping the rot: can poetry save the (he)art of nursing?

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Recent scandals within health care delivery within the UK NHS have seriously damaged the image of nursing and nursing care. Tabloid headlines herald the demise of care and compassion and question the current mandate of a once highly respected vocation.

Humanity and the nature of being human has to become more central to the educational preparation of our students, medicine has recognised it and now nursing needs to also. I believe that poetry can enable students and practitioners to refocus their attention, away from technology and meeting targets, back to the essence of care giving – connecting with other human beings. Drawing on poems by Sharon Olds, Jane Kenyon and Julia Darling I will discuss how experienced hospital and community nurses have responded to this work and the issues it has raised.

I will also share my experience of facilitating poetry writing with first year student nurses immediately after their first clinical placement and the capacity to care that they demonstrate within, often very moving, haiku. This capability to care needs to be recognised and preserved if the rot is to stop in nursing.

Sue Spencer is Senior Lecturer in Nursing at Northumbria University, Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Sue qualified as a Registered Nurse in the early 80's and worked in a number of clinical posts in hospital and community until 1996 when she moved into higher education. Sue completed the MA Creative Writing in poetry at Newcastle University in 2008 and liberally spreads poetry anywhere she can.