



Illustrating Professionalism and Humanism in Medicine

Roberta E. Sonnino, MD

Dr. Deborah E. Powell, former Dean, University of Kansas School of Medicine, was instrumental in the evolution of this project. Her support and encouragement is gratefully acknowledged.

"A picture is worth more than a thousand words"

Pictures of patients, their operations or their diseases are commonly used to teach students and residents the science of medicine. I also firmly believe in the importance of the art of medicine, and try to capture it too on film. Showing the course of an illness, from beginning to end, can be challenging, but also provides a record of a scary time in the child's life that takes on a pleasant connotation many years later. The interaction between patients and their families and health care providers show the human side of medicine, an aspect that I fervently believe is a critical part of treating patients. I teach students and residents the importance of these interactions in medicine, often through my pictures as well as in real life. There is no better way to record the human interactions and the humanism of medicine than through her photography. Over the years, I have accumulated thousands of images that tell many stories, thankfully most of surgical successes. The collection of images of my patients has formed the basis for an exhibit entitled "Fragile Beginnings", which has been shown in several cities, and is currently part of the permanent decor in the small group classrooms of the Creighton University School of Medicine

Research Question

This project utilized photography as a visual means to illustrate the humanistic and professionalism aspects of medicine. It sought to provide a photographic documentation of interactions between health care providers, patients and their families - and any combination of these individuals.

Publications / Posters

Sonnino RE: "Teamwork" – 'From "Phisition" to Medical Doctor – A Catalogue on the Evolution of Medical Education', Permanent Exhibit, AAMC Headquarters, Washington, DC

AAMC Reporter- Portraits in Medical Education Photography, March 2004: "Teamwork".

Sonnino RE et al: Professionalism, University of Kansas School of Medicine (August 2000)

Sonnino RE: Professionalism Initiative, Physician's Practice Digest, July-Aug 2000, pp. A1

Evidence and Process

I had been taking pictures of the medical environment my entire career, primarily as an extension of my personal hobby, but the images had never been open to public scrutiny. At the same time, it became apparent to physicians and medical educators, that our profession was losing some of the essential traits of a caring physician, and that humanism and professionalism were severely endangered. When I was asked to lead the "professionalism initiative" at my institution, some of the images seemed to be the best method to illustrate the message. At the encouragement of my dean, I began to explore the role of my photographs in the teaching of the importance of humanism and professionalism in medicine. This resulted in a photographic exhibit, that has since been repeated in several cities throughout the US.

It also prompted me to develop a photography "name" and a website where these images could be open to the public.

Next Steps

This project has caught the attention of individuals outside the medical profession, in the publishing industry, who felt that it would be a good topic for a coffee table book. The book proposal is currently under consideration for possible publication.



Reference

M.D. News, Cover Story: Dr. Roberta Sonnino, Professor of Surgery, Vol. 2, No 2: pp. 6-8 March 2004

NYIP Online Magazine: Student Perspective: The NYI Interview, July 2004

NBC Kansas City Affiliate Interview, September 10, 2002