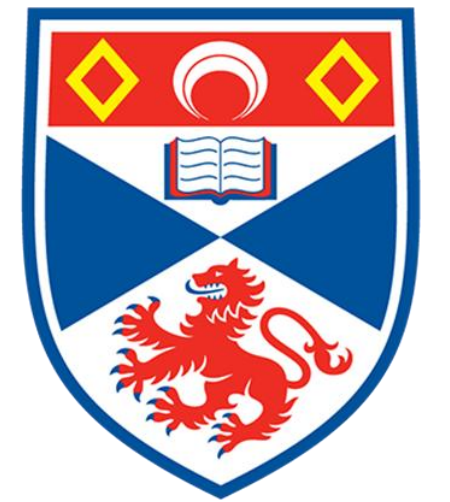


Self-Advocate and Listen: Examining the Importance of Contemporary Poetry to Improving Communication between Medical Professionals and Young Adult Patients

by Doroti Polgar

Supervisor: Professor David Herd, School of English



University of
St Andrews

INTRODUCTION

Young adult patients (aged 18-25) are vulnerable to failed communication with medical professionals, often posing significant risks to both physical and mental health. Despite this, the young adult perspective has received scarce research attention. This project addresses the need for improved communication and examines contemporary poetry as a resource for nurturing compassionate listening and confident self-advocacy.

The research essay is structured in chapters with the following headings: The Research Issue, A Brief History of Poetry and Medicine, Principles of Contemporary Poetry, Interviewee Responses to the Role of Poetry in Medical Communication, Recommendations for Practical Applications, Evaluation of Recommendations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Semi-structured interviews** (fully anonymised) with 8 young adult patients with experiences of communication in physical and mental health services and 5 medical professionals (specialising in general practice, physiotherapy, midwifery, and palliative medicine)
- All interview participants were asked about their experiences of communication in medical settings and viewpoints regarding how contemporary poetry could improve communication in the future
- Consulting **existing academic research and literature** on poetry and medicine, and the young adult patient experience
- Identifying relevant poetic principles in a **selection of ten contemporary poems** written by young adult patients, medical professionals, or close family

“Listen,

there will be beautiful days.

There are always beautiful days.

But, mostly there are just days. **I’ll take them**

one at a time.”

– Emma Taylor, *It’s A Beautiful Day to be Told You’ll Be Sick Forever* [1]

[They, at a conference, saw an] ‘Oncologist using poetry to communicate some of their experiences...I remember it...I can picture the hall we were in and the stage that he was stood on, so **it’s clearly quite an effective...emotive and powerful way of communicating**’

– Medical Professional 5

“There is hope for more compassionate communication between patients and medical professionals because I have seen it and I have experienced it, **I just wish it was what people could experience all the time**”

– Interview Participant 3

KEY FINDINGS

- Young adult patients reported **corroborating causes of ineffective communication** with medical professionals: ‘the power imbalance between doctors and patients’ [2], a lack of simple human conversation, frequent dismissal of concerns, unhelpful and unclear reactions to distress, and a lack of information
- There are **several key principles of contemporary poetry** which are applicable to fostering compassionate listening and confident self-advocacy skills: prioritisation of space over narrative, ambiguity, metaphor, close noticing, facilitation of expression and protest
- All participants responded positively to contemporary poetry as a resource for nurturing compassionate listening and confident self-advocacy
- All participants raised concerns regarding the high-pressure healthcare environment being a potential limitation
- Contemporary poetry could be effectively and practically used to improve communication primarily, but not exclusively, **outside of clinical settings**

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Contemporary poetry can be **practically applied to improving communication** between medical professionals and young adult patients in a variety of different ways that can be **incorporated into activities they already engage with**:

- Poetry workshops in communication skills sessions for medical students
- Poetry workshops as part of existing Vocational Training Scheme (VTS) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Scheme sessions
- Contemporary poetry written by young adult patients/medical professionals/and poetry more generally could be featured in medical newsletters, journals and magazines
- Inviting young adult poets with experiences as patients to speak at medical conferences and lectures
- Poetry workshops in school from an early age
- Poetry promoting self-advocacy could be displayed in waiting and consultation rooms
- Promoting the poetry of young adult poets who are also patients, making their work easily and widely accessible in clinical settings, at conferences, in schools, and across social media (potentially in collaboration with healthcare organisations and charities), can **allow more young adult patients to feel represented, heard, and empowered to advocate for themselves**

REFERENCES

- [1] Taylor, Emma. *Bed and Breakfast*. CPI Group, 2023.
[2] Dhairyawan, Dr Rageshri. *Unheard*. Trapeze, 2025.

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