

Brief notes

Caring and Sharing: Health and Humanities in Today's World – June 24 to 26 2021 (Project SHARE – Health and Humanities Acting Together, University of Lisbon, Portugal)

Caring and Sharing: Health and Humanities in Today's World – 24 a 26 de Junho de 2021 (Projecto SHARE – Saúde e Humanidades Atuando em Rede, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)

Caring and Sharing: Health and Humanities in Today's World – June 24 to 26 2021 (Projecto SHARE - Salud y Humanidades Actuando en Red, Universidad de Lisboa, Portugal)

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The sanitary and pandemic crisis the whole world has been enduring in the last two years has suddenly brought health as an issue under the spotlight. Every day and everywhere numbers concerning infected, hospitalised people, death rates and the ratio of vaccinated or unvaccinated people fill the news and conversations. The numbers exchanged seem to offer some sort of objectivity, which appears as the only safeguard in the middle of uncertainty and lack of knowledge. But these conversations are not real conversations. We do not know how it started, we do not quite know how it works, neither do we know what happens or why it happens to some and not to others—all we have are these numbers, and they seem to be too little. At the same time, it has become abundantly clear how fragile we are, how fragile we have always been. But it is precisely in the midst of this shared vulnerability that an encounter is made possible. It was under these



unprecedented and demanding conditions that Project SHARE's^(c) team put together the international conference entitled *Caring and Sharing: Health and Humanities in Today's World*, in June 2021. Even if its original motivation was not the covid-19 pandemic, it soon became clear that that circumstance had occasioned a global urgency that demanded being newly addressed: we had to re-think, re-write and re-live the caring and the sharing in the encounter between health and the humanities, and thus took the opportunity of doing so by placing all these issues at the centre of a polyphonic dialogue.

Over the last few decades, Medical Humanities (MH) have shown how humanistic and aesthetic tools can inform an approach to health and illness that places the clinical relation at the centre of a multi- and interdisciplinary approach to healthcare. Following recent developments in MH, Project SHARE – Health and Humanities Acting Together – has been actively involved in this emergent area in terms of research, education / training and fieldwork, thus contributing to a narrative transformation of health and health care¹. Therefore, at the end of an intensive three-year project with inter/national work and diversified activities, Project SHARE's team organised this international conference under the theme “Caring and Sharing: Health and Humanities in Today's World”. Due to the pandemic crisis, the conference took place online. Even with the distance restrictions and with the challenge of interacting with multiple time zones, the meeting proved to be a timely platform for sharing the outcomes of such involvement with an extended audience and for debating issues such as the limits and the potentialities of narrative within health care, the boundaries of MH and Narrative Medicine (NM), as well as the impact of using humanistic tools and methods in health care settings and educational contexts.

Given the general increase of MH around the world, as well as the crucial challenges this development poses and the academic opportunities it creates, this international conference responded to the need of having an adequate venue for different research groups, academics and projects from around the world to promote exchange of knowledge and to share research outputs and experiences. It also created opportunities for networking and fostering future research collaborations. The conference brought together researchers coming from multidisciplinary, mutually fertilising domains, such as literature and the arts, philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, pharmacy, medicine, nursing, physiotherapy, and bioethics, with open access to the general public, and also with contributions from doctors and other healthcare professionals, academics, researchers and students from the areas of health and of the humanities.

Besides the presence of leading scholars in the fields of MH and NM, such as Rita Charon, Brian Hurwitz and Katherine Hall, there were plenary lectures given by the Irish writer Lucy Caldwell and by Manuel Silvério Marques, a member of the University of Lisbon Project in Medical Humanities. In addition to the plenary sessions, the program included panels and parallel sessions where papers from multiple disciplinary fields were presented and discussed.

Among the panel themes were dance and its relevance to healthcare, the forms, functions, risks and effects of writing in the pandemic crisis, patient-centred care in physiotherapy, the narratives of numbers and how they shape our understanding of illness, the introduction of MH in the education of doctors, nurses and pharmacists, narrative in diabetes research and education, and the limits of illness representations. The parallel sessions of individual papers had as thematic axes the rethinking of narrative/ity

^(c) Projecto SHARE is funded by national funds through FCT – *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia*, ENEL - *Estratégia Nacional de Especialização Inteligente 2020* and EREI - *Estratégia Regional de Especialização Inteligente 2020* (Portugal)



in healthcare, the use of artistic and humanistic knowledge and methods in health, the creation of interdisciplinary educational programs, of in-field activities and other applied tasks, the social impacts of MH, patient education and patients as educators, the limits of representing illness, writing and confinement, literature and the pandemics, art-based interventions in health care and other settings, therapeutic uses of the arts, the impact of MH on health care relationships and dynamics in practice, science fiction and medical and ethical issues, among others. We had the privilege of counting on contributions from researchers from all over the world: Austria, Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, New Zealand, Spain, UK, USA and Taiwan. About 150 people participated in the conference, including plenary speakers and other speakers, session chairs and the general public. Even remotely and from different time zones, the quality and innovative character of the contributions offered and discussed during the event made it an undeniable success. This was also the result of the intellectual generosity of all participants and of the talented commitment each participant put in the presentations and discussions that were carried out. For all these reasons, we are now preparing a peer-reviewed volume for the publication of selected contributions.

Authors' contribution

All authors actively participated in all stages of preparing the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Editor

Antonio Pithon Cyrino

Associated editor

Carolina Siqueira Mendonça

Translator

Joana Corrêa Monteiro

Submitted on

09/20/21

Approved on

11/18/21

Reference

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