

humanities at the heart of health care



A PROGRAM OF THE MAINE HUMANITIES COUNCIL

It is as important to know the person who has the disease as it is to know the disease the person has.
Sir William Osler



Literature & Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care® is a national award-winning reading and discussion program for health care professionals that, as one participant writes, “renews the heart and soul of health care.”

Literature & Medicine discussions help health care professionals improve their communication and interpersonal skills while increasing

their cultural awareness, empathy for patients, and job satisfaction. ■ First created by the Maine Humanities Council in 1997 for Maine health care professionals, *Literature & Medicine* groups will have met in over 130 health care facilities in 25 states by 2010—from Florida to Montana, Maine to Hawai‘i—including 15 Veterans Administration hospitals.

“WHAT A MIRACLE TO SEE THROUGH ANOTHER’S EYES.” HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

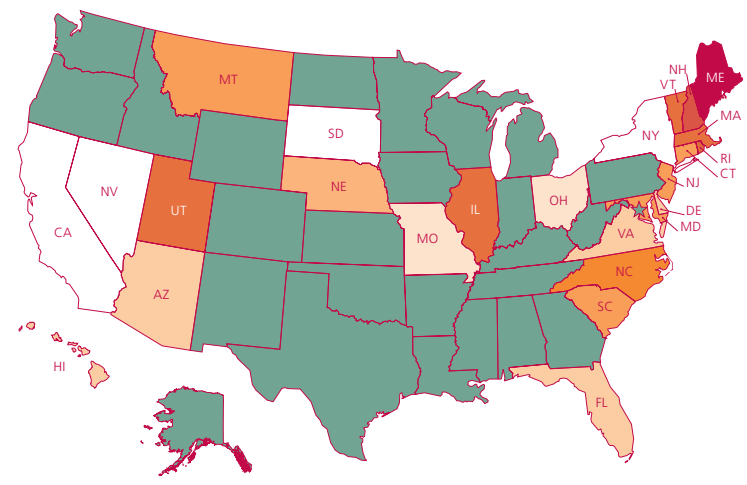
The program is deceptively simple—the effects often profound. Reading and discussing literary accounts of illness, death, and human relationships in other places and times helps participants see the world from the perspectives of others. This is crucially important for health care professionals, who treat patients and work with colleagues from religious, socio-economic, or cultural backgrounds different from their own. Discussing shared readings with colleagues and considering what they do, through the lens of literature, deepens participants’ understanding of their work and enriches relationships with patients and one another.

Literature & Medicine is the only national program that engages a cross section of experienced health care professionals with the humanities. Program participants work in all aspects of patient care and include nurses, physicians, support and allied staff, administrators, clergy, social workers, and therapists in hospital, home health, hospice, and public health settings.

Literature & Medicine is an innovative and cost-effective way to improve patient care while contributing to participants’ job satisfaction. Increased respect among colleagues in different disciplines and job descriptions

builds community within an institution and helps ease feelings of futility and isolation. As one participant wrote, “It feels wonderful to come back to why I was attracted to medicine in the beginning and to share dialogue with others who care.” In the words of another, “This program brings joy to my work.”

Read the program’s e-newsletter, *Synapse*, at www.mainehumanities.org/programs/litandmed/synapse/index.html to learn more.



OUTCOMES

RESULTS OF THIS DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE PRACTICE? PARTICIPANTS BETWEEN 2005 AND 2008 REPORTED A GREAT OR MEDIUM INCREASE IN:

- EMPATHY FOR PATIENTS 79%
- INTERPERSONAL SKILLS 64%
- COMMUNICATION SKILLS 58%
- JOB SATISFACTION 62%
- CULTURAL AWARENESS 67%



“Surgeons commune with nurses from our long-term care facility; secretaries speak with equal voice to administrators; laboratory technicians give their viewpoint to obstetricians. In short, [Literature & Medicine] has greatly improved communications among participating employees, and has also improved communications with patients.” HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATOR

“I was really burned out when I started this, and did not realize I had some of the biases I had. I think the readings helped me get some of those behind me a little bit. And I think I am a better nurse now. ... I have my patience back and tolerance and a little better understanding of some people that I probably would have judged differently before.” NURSE

“[When we read Regeneration in the group a few years ago,] I had just submitted my resignation to the hospital. I was working with patients whom I interpreted as acting out... [and felt] frustration and anger at poor compliance and defensiveness when the responsibility for illness was shifted toward me. ... That book, and the discussion we had, changed my view of my patients and gave me a better understanding of post traumatic stress disorder and what my patients might be experiencing. I decided to stay. ... Now, I have a broader viewpoint that makes me both more sympathetic and less vulnerable.” PHYSICIAN

“The Literature & Medicine group doesn’t just support you where you are—it lifts you up to a higher place.” NURSE

“I now think about what people are feeling when they approach my desk, and I am more conscious of the fact that I am the first person they speak to when they come to the hospital.” HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

“The program definitely affects my everyday life as a health care professional and also in my personal life dealing with people that are dealing with illness. I feel that being in the health care profession, you can get caught up in the diagnosis or lab tests and forget about the person’s emotional side of dealing with their illness...reading the books/stories/poems in this program and discussing them in a group setting...has made me see more of the whole picture.” PHYSICIAN

Literature & Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care®
has received major funding from the **National Endowment for the Humanities**,
and is offered in partnership with state humanities councils across the country.

GET INVOLVED!

Please contact Lizz Sinclair
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for more information.

Visit mainehumanities.org
to read *Synapse*, the program's
e-newsletter, and visit the
program's website.



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The Maine Humanities Council engages the people of Maine in the power and pleasure of ideas, encouraging a deeper understanding of ourselves and others, fostering wisdom in an age of information, and providing context in a time of change. The Council uses the humanities to provide cultural enrichment for all Mainers and as a tool for social change, bringing people together in conversation that crosses social, economic and cultural barriers.