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Endnote on “Finding Wholeness”

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Endnote on “Finding Wholeness”

“We ought to strengthen and balance the whole system,” (Jewett, *A Country Doctor*).

As a graduate student at the 2015 Survive and Thrive Conference and Arts Festival, organized by Rex Veeder, I discovered a new facet of interdisciplinarity and a wholeness of community. I presented my research on alternative and holistic healing practices in Sarah Orne Jewett’s novels alongside poets, practitioners, and patients--some of whom were academics, but not all.

Jewett’s writing, much like *Survive and Thrive*, creates a space encouraging multi-faceted forms of healing. In *A Country Doctor*, Jewett distinguishes between the 19th century scientist who merely prescribes medicine to treat the *disease* and the “gentleman doctor” who attentively listens to and treats the *patient*. Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs* brings to light a medical model differing from the dichotomy between alternative medicine and biomedicine. The small town of Dunnet Landing shows the possibility of both medical models working simultaneously and cooperatively to treat the ailments of its citizens.

Despite the one-hundred-plus years difference between the publication of Jewett’s novels and this special issue of *Survive and Thrive*, we can draw similarities between them and the dichotomies they blur. Where Jewett gives voice to both the biomedical doctor and the herbalist, the “gentleman doctor” and the scientist, *Survive and Thrive* gives voice to both the artist and the scholar, the practitioner and the patient.

Narrative medicine and medical humanities continue to bring a sense of wholeness to my academic work. I now teach first year writing with a narrative medicine focus to new students of the CUNY School of Medicine, and Introduction to Literature with a narrative medicine theme to students at Queensborough Community College. In assigning future medical students to explore the ways metaphors illuminate and obscure our understanding of illness through their writing, I hope to encourage them to think critically about the ways in which language shapes meaning so they may eventually bring this understanding to the exam room. By thematically choosing literature that tells familiar narratives of health and illness, I hope to give my students at the community college a space to both practice close reading, and to examine how their own varying illness/health experiences shape their interpretations of the texts.

Editing this issue of *Survive and Thrive* has extended that sense of wholeness from my own research and my classroom to a broader intellectual life, an intellectual community of poets, practitioners, and patients. The depth and variety of the work submitted not only attests to the transformative power of narrative medicine/medical humanities, but also has within itself the power to transform. I have gained new perspective on the enduring positive effects of narrative

medicine and medical humanities through the process of fostering and facilitating the research and stories of our contributors and have been inspired to continue my work with *Survive and Thrive* into the next issue.

I would like to thank Rex Veeder for bringing life to this journal, David Beard for inviting me into the editorial process, and those who have submitted their own personal narratives, creative writing, and research on narrative medicine, medical humanities and wholeness.

--Julia Brown
Co-Editor of *Survive and Thrive*