3 Goals and 1 Question

• Goal #1: Share examples of the power stories hold
• Goal #2: Share the science behind story
• Goal #3: Share ways to use stories in healthcare
How Can We Partner with Patients if We Don’t Know Their Story?
How Stories Can Change People
How Powerful Are Stories?
HEH, DID YOU COME IN HERE TO SULK, TOO?
“We’re going to sell Jack like soap flakes!” Joseph P. Kennedy
The War of the Worlds, Mercury Theatre on the Air, 1938 Original Broadcast
Power of Story (or Myth) in Healthcare

- Beta Blockers in early heart attack\(^1\)
- Back surgery vs non-surgical treatment\(^2\)
- HRT for menopausal women\(^3\)
- Coronary stents to prevent heart attacks\(^3\)
- Leeching
- Lobotomies

\(^1\) Chen ZM et al,(2005). \textit{Lancet}.
Why Are We So Ready to Believe Stories?

The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human

• Have only speculated on story’s persuasive effects.
• Over last few decades, psychologists have studied how stories affect the mind
• Results show attitudes, fears, hopes, and values are strongly influenced by story
• Fiction seems to be more effective at changing beliefs than persuasive argument and evidence

What Neuroscientists & Psychologists Have Found About Our Brains on Story
fMRI Studies

• Brains of viewers “catch” emotions of characters on screen or on the page
  – The Good, the Bad and the Ugly at Dartmouth lab
• Anterior insula (seat of disgust) lit up when viewing short, disgusting clips
  – Mbemba Jabbi lab
• Neurons fire as if we were:
  – Making Sophie’s Choice
  – Stalked by Jason
  – Landing on the beach at Normandy

Stories Can Activate and Even Rewire the Brain

- Instill empathy
- Dopamine neurons fire, keeping us riveted to the page, screen or stage
- Activate motor, touch, taste & olfactory neurons

Stories Can Activate and Even Rewire the Brain

- Cinnamon
- Lavender
- Coffee

We Tell Stories to Survive

- Healthy people tend to view themselves positively – self-aggrandizing starts as a child
- Depressed people have an “incoherent story” or “inadequate narrative account of one’s self”
- Talk therapy works as well, sometimes better than antidepressants or CBT.

We Tell Stories to Survive

• To make sense of the all information coming at us
• Incorporate our experience, and the experience of others, into stories we tell ourselves
• Differentiate between what is important, dangerous, irrelevant
• Trigger fight or flight
We Use Stories as a Dress Rehearsal for Real Life

• What’s the worst thing that could happen if a man had an affair while his wife and daughter were out of town?
In Fatal Attraction, Stars Glenn Close and Michael Douglas live a nightmare of the late 1980s. The Thriller Is Back.
• What would I do if my uncle killed my father and married my mother?
• What would I do if I found my son was hiding an alien in his closet?
How Stories are Being Used to Change Behavior
In Business

• Meaningful brand identity
In Healthcare

• Red Cross
In Healthcare

• Medical Humanities Programs: Penn State
  – Graphic Narratives
  – TimeSlips
Advancing to 3rd year was the BEST! No more power points. No more poorly written exams. Just patient care.

Like a boss:

- Bright smile (just put in my first epidural)
- 15-pocket white coat
- Every med student's utility belt

I had just finished a shelf exam when...

- Hey, Kevin. What the...? Sounds like someone has a monster problem.
- Kind of... I just finished OB... they have a monster problem.
- You'll just have to find out.

The following Monday I started my rotation in labor and delivery. I met the team in the sign-out room.

- Who is the senior this month?
- HER... WNDN NOT HER!

Senior resident, covering as intern, not happy about it.

Internal... cool dude.

Oh boy...

Mr. No idea what's going on.

Perspectives by Trey Banbury, M2

Knowledge and Compassion Focused on You
In Healthcare

• Narrative Medicine Programs
  – Columbia University – Rita Charon MD, PhD
  – Georgetown University – Margaret Cary MD
  – Big on reflective writing
In Healthcare

- Rick Stone

Leverage the Power of Story for Safety, Satisfaction and Sustainable Change

MedStar Health
Institute for Quality and Safety
Knowledge and Compassion Focused on You
In Healthcare

- Tina Campbell
In Healthcare
In Healthcare

• MedStar
  – Good Catch Stories
  – HeRO Series
Story in Healthcare Research
Understanding Narrative Effects: The Impact of Breast Cancer Survivor Stories...Among African American Women

• Purpose
  – Examine the longitudinal effects of personal narratives about mammography and breast cancer vs. traditional informational approach

Understanding Narrative Effects: The Impact of Breast Cancer Survivor Stories...Among African American Women

- **Design**
  - 489 African American women >40
  - Low income neighborhoods
  - Randomized to watch 1 of 2 video interventions:
    - Breast cancer survivors vs. Informational video
  - Measures at Baseline, Immediate post-viewing, 3 months, 6 months
Understanding Narrative Effects: The Impact of Breast Cancer Survivor Stories...Among African American Women

Measurements:

• Initial reaction
  – Positive and negative affect
  – Trust
  – Identification
  – Engagement

Understanding Narrative Effects: The Impact of Breast Cancer Survivor Stories...Among African American Women

Measurements:

• Message processing at 3 Months
  – Arguing against message (Counterarguing)
  – Talking with family about the information (Cognitive rehearsal)

Understanding Narrative Effects: The Impact of Breast Cancer Survivor Stories...Among African American Women

Measurements:

- Behavioral correlates at T4
  - Perceived breast cancer risk
  - Cancer fear
  - Cancer fatalism
  - Perceived barriers to mammography
  - Recall of core messages

Understanding Narrative Effects: The Impact of Breast Cancer Survivor Stories...Among African American Women

Conclusions: Narratives produced--
• Stronger cognitive and affective responses
• Influenced message processing & behavioral correlates
• ↓ Counterarguing
• ↑ Cognitive rehearsal
• May ↑ acceptance and motivation to act on health information

Narrative Communication in Cancer Prevention and Control: A Framework to Guide Research and Application

Purpose:
• Stimulate critical thinking around use of narrative in cancer communication
• Promote research to understand narrative effect
• Discuss narrative capabilities of:
  1. Overcoming resistance
  2. Facilitate information processing
  3. Provide surrogate social connections
  4. Address emotional and existential issues

Narrative Communication in Cancer Prevention and Control: A Framework to Guide Research and Application

Conclusions:

• Narrative may be well suited to address all cancer prevention objectives
• Narrative may be:
  – Unnecessary or inappropriate for certain communication objectives
  – Obscure health messages
  – May be difficult to create
• Use of narrative in cancer promising and growing but still much to learn
Storytelling for Promoting Colorectal Cancer Screening Among Underserved Latina Women: A Randomized Pilot Study

Purpose:

• Researchers compared a culturally aligned narrative intervention program to promote colon cancer screening and prevention vs. a risk tool intervention

Storytelling for Promoting Colorectal Cancer Screening Among Underserved Latina Women: A Randomized Pilot Study

Conclusion:

• Storytelling may be an effective approach for changing risk-related behaviors

• Perceived risk or fear may not completely explain persuasive mechanism of storytelling.

Culturally Appropriate Storytelling to Improve Blood Pressure

Purpose:
• To test an interactive storytelling intervention

Design:
• Randomized, controlled trial
• 230 African Americans with hypertension
• Intervention: 3 DVDs of patient stories from study population
• Control Group: Attention control DVD

Houston, TK et al. (2011). *Annals of Int Med*
Culturally Appropriate Storytelling to Improve Blood Pressure

Measurement:
- Change in blood pressure vs. control group at baseline, 3, 6, and 9 months

Results:
- At 3 month mark, storytelling intervention produced significant improvements in blood pressure of subjects with uncontrolled hypertension at baseline
- Blood pressure subsequently increased for both groups though between group differences remained constant

How to Tell Good Stories
Peter Guber: Story of Success

- Producer or EP: Midnight Express, Rain Man, Batman, The Color Purple, The Kids Are Alright…
- Owner: Golden State Warriors
- Co-Owner: LA Dodgers
- Author: Tell to Win
- HBR: The Four Truths of the Storyteller
Peter Guber: Truth to the Teller

- Be true to yourself
- Share in the emotion
- Be vulnerable
- Let others identify with you
- Open your heart to touch another’s heart

Peter Guber: Truth to the Audience

- Test the story on others
- Know them, meet them where they are
- Let them take part, and be a hero, in the story
- Make the “I” in the story “We” – Invite the tribe to come along
Peter Guber: Truth to the Moment

• Same story is told differently as needed
• Repetition and practice
• Ready to improvise
• Spontaneity and brevity

Peter Guber: Truth to the Mission

- Mission is guidepost of the story
- Devoted to a cause beyond self
- Cause can be modest or great, but important to teller and audience
- People need something/someone to believe in

Jim Berk: CEO Participant Media

- Feature & documentary films
  - The Help
  - The Kite Runner
  - Lincoln
  - Syriana
  - Waiting for Superman

Berk, J. (2013). Forbes,
Jim Berk: 5 Storytelling Tips for Change

• Shine A Light
• Collaborate
• Empower Involvement—Connect the Dots
• Speak to Your Audience
• Be Authentic & Transparent
Stories...

• Teach us about the world
• Shape who we are to become
• Ground us in who we are
• Expand our destiny
• Connect us with our humanity...hopes and dreams...fears and worries
• Level the playing field between provider and patient
Where to Use Stories in Healthcare

• To move an initiative forward
• To inspire those you lead
• To better connect with patients
  – Understand what successful treatment means to them
  – Influence adherence to treatment
• It costs nothing to ask a patient to share their story, and the return can be immeasurable
Wisdom of Don Berwick: The Ultimate Storytelling Healthcare Leader

• Some patients, and their stories, will touch and teach in ways you could never predict…
• If you allow it—and you should allow it—these patients will enter your soul, and you will, in a way entirely right and proper, love them. These people will be your teachers.
Resources

- Educate the Young (Blog)
- New York Times Well: Voices (Blog)
- StoryCare, Rick Stone
- RealTime Associates, Tina Campbell
- Joan Lowery, Communications Consultant
- Rita Charon, Narrative Medicine, Columbia University
- Penn State, Medical Humanities
- Aerogramme Writer’s Studio
- Robert McKee
- The Newseum, Washington DC
- TED.com
- The Story of Telling
- Epipheo Studios
- Participant Media
- Peter Guber
References


