

## LEONARDO'S CORNER



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LITERARY RESUSCITATION. A NARRATIVE PROJECT IN S.  
MARIA DELLE CROCI HOSPITAL IN RAVENNA, ITALY

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SUMMARY

LITERARY RESUSCITATION

*This article shows a qualitative experience achieved in Santa Maria delle Croci Hospital in Ravenna, Italy, named Literary Resuscitation of Intensive Poetry. The results show how literature, art, music and storytelling positively affect hospitalization. Furthermore, the study is useful to the healthcare professionals in order to understand the emotive, cognitive and relational needs of the patients. The authors underline the importance of creating spaces that encourage participation in the responsible and shared care path.*

*Introduction*

If the concept of hospital-company has become a reality, the proper functioning of this entity should not however be based much on the criteria of expense-revenue and number of services, according to a concept of accounting economics, but rather in terms of investment and production of health according to criteria of economic ethics. It is here, at its base, that the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness should be placed where efficiency means the performance of a healthcare activity seen in terms of mortality, suffering and inequal-

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ity in presence of illness, and for effectiveness it is considered the same activity to modify the course of a disease for the better<sup>1</sup>.

As Augé and Good<sup>2</sup> have stated, illness is both the most social and the most individual of events both in personal life and in society. Everything in it is also social, not only because the institutions take charge of some steps of the evolution of the disease but also because the possible patterns to identify it, give it a name and treat it, are eminently social. Thinking about your illness already means referring to others<sup>3</sup>.

Starting from this premise, the purpose of this paper is partly to take up the debate raised by several authors<sup>4</sup> on central disciplines contributing to Medical Humanities, and on the privileged role of Narrative Based Medicine. The question discussed here is not about the centrality of one discipline to another, but in which way they can be useful to patients and health professionals.

One thought runs on history and literature because Narrative Medicine is the subject of initiatives and projects tested at local and national level, with interesting results. The proposed reflection focuses on the Ravenna experience, with the aim of giving visibility and stimulating a share, without claiming to be exhaustive, of this successful experience, which has been recognized abroad and also at a Senate congress in 2019.

What has been carried out in the Hospital of S. Maria delle Croci in Ravenna has led to results to the extent that the narrative was used as a tool for understanding the experiences of people in facing hospital pathways of illness. And if in the United States Narrative Medicine has now been formalized also within universities, in Italy for some years the hospital of Ravenna has started an important initiative that has led to a series of conferences and projects at international level of which Literary Resuscitation wants to be the starting point<sup>5</sup>.

### *Narrative Projects: Literary Resuscitation*

Coming hence and forth hospitals for relatives and friends it is not hard to realize that hospitals, diseases, sorrow have always been part

of songs, movies, books and literature in general but not the opposite. In fact songs, films, and books rarely enter hospital rooms to do what Art generally does that is to relieve, to bring lightheartedness and happiness and most of all hope.

Who doesn't recognize in the song "Just a spoonful of sugar and the medicine go down" the powerful word medicine? Who can't remember films like Philadelphia or Patch Adams or Autumn in New York? And film series like Dr House and Gray's anatomy? Who has never read books in which hospitals, diseases or doctors are characters or are books written by authors who were at the same time patients: just one for all, Virginia Woolf. And what about Frieda Kahlo's paintings where wounds are shown with sharp precision? Why hospitals and patients are so often inside Art and not vice-versa?

In the theory of *Non lieux*, carried out by Marc Augè, there are spaces which become anthropological places or symbolic ones: they are supermarkets, stations, airport waiting areas, social meeting places in general like squares, gardens and theme parks. Nowadays they are so liquid that the recognizable features of identity and relationship are lost. The Hospital, quoting Augè, is the place where we are given birth and where we die and in between we just transit in interstitial places where we are considered only users of specific services through a credit card or an identity document, not as real people. Hospitals too, can be considered places in which the human beings can become numbers or are defined through their disease. Hospitals, according to this theory, belong to the fragmented places where there is no border area between life and death, between being an active character in society or being helped and considered sometimes even a burden, between having an identity and a story to tell and being an anonymous patient. And thus communication, the real, deep one, is lost. And homogenization is the figure.

The evolution from surgery to soulgery in S. Maria delle Croci Hospital started from an urge that led to the idea<sup>6</sup> to bring literature so

books, art and music inside the premises of the Hospital. In the project, the mayor of Ravenna was involved in addition to the head doctor in order to create a cultural department there, a kind of Words Ward. A survey was made and it was found a room close to the oncology ward which fit the needs. It was far from the department enough not to disturb patients but at hand to be reached in case someone wished to join the show. In order to make the room more welcoming it was contacted the headmaster of the Arts High School and the students were invited to paint and draw motivational sentences on the cold walls of the room and then a name was invented. It is Literary reanimation of intensive poetry.

Another reached objective was to contact several publishing houses asking for authors to send there right on Sundays because that is the moment in which time is suspended and patients are most of the time alone. Big names of the Italian writing scenario as well as singers, bands, poets, journalists and artists in general who keep joining us week after week For two hours a hospital room would turn into a Soulgero or the Words and art ward.

The Hospital and the Municipality have strong supported both the planning and the organization of the different activities, believing in the potential healing power and already in 2015 it was inaugurated the first afternoon activity with an emotional show by Parole Note of Radio Capital. From that moment on, it has never stopped.

In the light of the encouraging results obtained, the municipality decided to build a real library inside the hospital and it was inaugurated on last June under the name of Enrico's Library<sup>7</sup>. Now some of the activities are carried out there.

This resident library too was the result of a strong synergy of different realities: municipality, hospital, sponsors, citizens. In fact a great number of citizens donated the books that are brand new inside the library and are still more than 1500 with audiobooks, and magazines and newspapers as well, now. More than this, the library is entirely

run by volunteers who open it every morning while, on Sundays, many lectures are held there. It is 100 square metres and it is bright orange and white in the corner of the hospital building.

Two places then: the “*WORDS WARD*” and the library, that Sunday after Sunday, event after event, have become a solid appointment inside the hospital.

Last but not least to mention is “fundraising”. How much does the entire operation cost to the local hospital and city administration? Not a single penny so far. Artists and authors come for free and all the things offered are for free. It is like a call for papers that turns to be a call for solidarity.

A good reason for this goal is because everybody knows how naked and weak we feel when we are sick. Pain and suffering are universal shared experiences and this place is a crossroads of lives, sufferings, cure, happy moments and suspended times: the feelings are amplified by a space which identifies as an external stream in which the patient is absorbed and sometimes trapped.

For this reason reading, music, poetry become a fundamental part of a therapy which amplifies the power of medicine and drugs in the general sense, in a place where time sometimes is felt as a burden because it shrinks, expands or fastens while waiting for a positive outcome of a therapy or of an intervention or just a hospital admit and check.

Patients can elaborate sorrow only if hope is considered a fundamental element of the therapy. Volunteers are doing the best to add to the irreplaceable cures given by the hospital and hospital workers, the potential healing power of smiles, musical notes, colours and words. Medical Humanities, bibliotherapy, several case studies about the benefits of music, reading and the timeless thaumaturgic power of writing and story telling, all together, should contribute to offer a new and more human perception of hospitals, cures and medicine in general.

### *Conclusion*

The problem we are facing today is to free ourselves from the stratigraphic model, according to which a man is composed by overlapping levels, which are to be browsed one after the other and to opt for a new model, still in reality not fully defined, that allows the integration of knowledge and within which there are spaces for negotiation and dialogue<sup>8</sup>.

It is now known that medicine must take into account all those emotional aspects that characterize the person and affect more or less directly the state of the disease<sup>9</sup>. Within these objectives, all the knowledge derived from the experience flourished in the Hospital of Santa Maria delle Croci in Ravenna, allowed to create a real therapeutic alliance that led to the real consideration of redefining possible lifestyles.

This contribution highlighted the new strong bond that has been created between medicine and existence, proposing qualitative tools and methodologies that allow us to really listen to existential projects and reduce suffering.

Moreover, the Literary Resuscitation project is part of the logic of integrating Evidence Based Medicine with Narrative Based Medicine, seeking to promote the continuity of care and the centrality of the individual, with a look at the need for continuous training of health workers.

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  6. On 15th April 2019 Resuscitation was invited at the Senate of the Italian Republic to talk about the experience carried out from 2015.
  7. *Literary Resuscitation of Intense Poetry* was founded by Prof. Livia Santini.
  8. Enrico Liverani was one of the council members of the municipality of Ravenna whose motto was “People feel better and are happier where there is more culture”. He unexpectedly died in 2015.
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