

Script – Broadcast – The art of listening

INTRO

When it comes to providing exceptional care, health care providers are constantly looking for ways to better connect with their patients. That was a lesson Amanda Bruemmer, MD, learned early in her career. Dr. Bruemmer was an English major in college who loved creative writing. But she knew she wanted to go to medical school, so she dove into chemistry, physics and biology courses as she earned her Bachelor of Science in Microbiology and English from the University of Michigan. That's when a friend told her about a narrative medicine master's program at Columbia University in New York.

(((SOS)))

Dr. Amanda Bruemmer (BREM-ER), physician, OSF HealthCare

"Narrative medicine is learning about stories, how we tell stories, why we tell stories, how we listen to stories, and then using that information in a clinical setting when you're taking care of patients to provide more personalized and more comprehensive care," says Dr. Bruemmer, an OSF HealthCare physician, who is dual certified in internal medicine and pediatrics. (:13)

VO

The term "narrative medicine" was coined in 2000 by Rita Charon, MD, PhD, who literally wrote the book on narrative medicine and is the executive director of Columbia's program in narrative medicine. In many interviews, Dr. Charon says the impetus for starting this program was "a need for providers to look at their processes to see and appreciate what patients are telling us. For me, it became a way for patients to feel heard and noticed."

In 2012, Dr. Bruemmer earned a master's degree in narrative medicine from Columbia. Among the program's topics are memoir writing and visual arts. She says the training has helped her become a more empathetic physician when treating patients.

(((SOS)))

Dr. Amanda Bruemmer (BREM-ER), physician, OSF HealthCare

"A lot of my job in narrative medicine is just not to talk," says Dr. Bruemmer. "It's just to listen, listen to how they're talking about how they're feeling, how they're talking about their illness, how they're talking about their experiences. And once I've heard that, I can help them figure out where they want to go next." (:16)

TAG

The greatest benefit of narrative medicine is to the patients, even though they may not know or understand the concept. Dr. Bruemmer cites an example of patients who've experienced a heart attack. These patients may have the same diagnosis, but the way they handle the news can be vastly different. That's where narrative medicine can help.

Many medical schools have followed Columbia's lead by offering a variety of courses and seminars on the subject. Dr. Bruemmer says many physicians she knows are interested in learning more about narrative medicine. In the long run, she says, it will help each provider build a more well-rounded practice. As for the future, Dr. Bruemmer says narrative medicine will play a significant role in how people interact with their providers. Sure, technology will continue to make headlines as it evolves and shape medicine. But meeting basic expectations – such as listening to patients and learning of their stories – will always be at the forefront of good patient care.