Illness Narratives:
Creative Drama Within

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ABSTRACT

An illness narrative is constructed when a person engages with both internal dialogues with himself and in interactions with the others during their journey; these can be transformed into dramatic script for social and self–beneficence. This paper explores whether process-centered creative drama could be the optimum modality for this dramatization. It also suggests that this process can be captured to assist the ill person, their care-givers, and others in understanding the dynamic process of illness.

Keywords: Creative-Drama, Illness Narrative, Journey, Narrative, Patients

Acta est fabula, plaudit. (The drama has been acted out, applaud.) (Said to have been the last words of the Emperor Augustus Caesar. Lived 63 BC-AD 14)

This exploratory paper begins with the concept of illness and the ways in which, to varying degrees, it affects behaviour. It argues that this has a dramatic nuance that shapes the understanding and experience of each and every individual. It suggests that this establishes illness narratives as external demonstrations of the constructed ‘script’ of illness. We further argue that the enactment of this narrative-script is required. We also explore which genera of literature, and modality in that genus, should serve as optimal choice. In conclusion we discuss how this dramatization of the illness narrative can be used as a learning tool to enable the patient to appreciate their journey. It also postulates

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that this has potential to enable health care professionals and others to empathise with the patient and enable them to optimise their health.

ILLNESS: EXTENT AND NATURE

According to Detels et al. (2009) illness in its deep rooted meaning is the deviation from being perfect in every dimension in order to lead a faultless creative and liberating life… an ideal scenario is imagined. As perfection is an optimistic fantasy in the real world; the element of illness is omnipresent in bits and fractions in every living individual. The fraction of illness compared to one’s fraction of healthiness, coupled with idiosyncratic response of the individual to his infirmity, constructs some nonfigurative emotions and atypical stance to ‘self’ and ‘others’.

Illness lets the sufferer visualize the exterior world from his own illness perspective/s’ simultaneously the ‘others’ also gradually contextualize the victim affected by the illness. This interaction between the victim, illness, and others on this ‘embedded ground’ may initiate and expand the ‘script’ of illness. This script, assembled by victim and others’ perceptions of him/her and subsequent reactions to illness paired with mutual interactions during the journey, combine to construct the discourse of the illness. This situational succession of events, wrapped with conflicts and emotions, creates a ‘dramatic reality’ (Drama=”action” Classical Greek: δρᾶμα, drama) (“drama”, 2013).

There was never yet an uninteresting life. Such a thing is impossibility. Inside of the dullest exterior there is a drama, a comedy and a tragedy. - (Mark Twain, American humorist and writer: 1835-1910)

ILLNESS NARRATIVE: FACE OF ILLNESS JOURNEY

The vocal outward expressions of the ‘script’ of an illness journey are illness narratives. These can be explained as stories of illnesses as told by the patient himself. However to equate narratives with simple story-telling is an oversimplification. Illness narratives are constructed on the foundation of the experiences and events shared by the victim their illness, their external environment and relationships. This concretization or sense of reality brings to the narrative a non-fictional realism, truth and authenticity. Simultaneously on a philosophical plane a narrative script is the offshoot of the multidimensional complex adaptive interaction of victim with their dynamic environment, the legitimacy of truth turns into circumstantial, fictional, and relative rather than an absolute one. Arguably this simultaneous flow of two apparently paradoxical currents of absolutism and relativism, fiction and nonfiction combine to transform a straightforward narrative into a form of theatrical screenplay. The performer journeys through their illness travelling through several chapters on suffering, oppression, sanguinity, resistance, grief, bliss, camaraderie, solitude and many more contradictory sentiments. When worked into an evocative contour by the performer himself….a thespian narrative emerges from it.

Frank (2007) describes first-person narratives of illness experiences as dramatic: the narrator, who is also the sufferer, is caught in conflicts of forces that permit understanding more than control. Among the dramas of illness, five dramas occur frequently in autobiographical accounts of illness. These dramas overlap and have varying emphases in the individual’s story. These are the dramas of genesis, what instigated
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