Chapter 2

Write to Transform Your Health

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is a description of the workshop, ‘Transform your Health: Write to Heal™,’ created by John Evans. Writing and facilitating optimal well-being and vibrant living are the authors’ passions and they feel privileged to fuse these passions in this chapter.

WRITE TO TRANSFORM YOUR HEALTH

The following chapter is a description of the workshop, ‘Transform your Health: Write to Heal™,’ created by John Evans. The concepts of ‘Transform your Health: Write to Heal™’ are taught to healthcare providers at our signature retreat, ‘Leading Patients in Writing for Health.’ When we are leading this workshop, we are truly in FLOW as our friend and colleague, Michelle Bailey (2014) reminds us in her description of “fully living our why.” Writing and facilitating optimal well-being and vibrant living are our passions, and we feel privileged to fuse these passions in this work. It is our joy to witness the transformation – sometimes gentle, sometimes dramatic and dynamic - that writing, as the alchemist, facilitates in our workshop and retreat participants. In addition to describing specific workshops, our chapter draws on our experiences as participant/observers in both ‘Transform your Health: Write to Heal™’ (Evans, 2010) and as co-leaders of our the signature ‘Leading Patients in Writing for Health’ which we created to meet the needs expressed by healthcare providers who wished to use this work with their own patients and clients. ‘Transform Your Health’ was first offered at Duke Integrative Medicine three years ago and currently is offered there two or three times a year. ‘Leading Patients in Writing for Health’ is offered at Duke Integrative Medicine each spring. We are honored to describe our work for this collection of essays.

We use several genres of writing to lead our clients towards self-awareness and self-knowledge, to the compassionate examination of their lives and to intentional and joyful

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living. At the center of vibrant well-being is the practice of mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2009) describes mindfulness as “paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment, non judgmentally”. The power of writing lies in its capacity to be a mindfulness practice. By writing, we can pay attention, on purpose, to the present moment, without judgment and with compassion. Seeing our lives and ourselves with clarity and compassion is at the core of well-being.

As a mindfulness practice, writing becomes the alchemist, which moves our clients from darkness to light, which transforms them from fragility to resilience, from suffering to joy, from emotional discomfort to inner well-being.

All participants who are quoted in this chapter granted permission for their work to be published.

A significant part of mindfulness writing is paying attention to the power of our language as a co-creator of our lives as suggested in this poem created by writing workshop participant, Sandy Roberts this year.

**I Carry Words**

*I carry words in my hip pocket.*
*Blue words sung by John Lee Hooker;*
*Secret words hidden in a locket;*
*Sinning words heavy as lead;*
*False words that lovers said;*
*Scarlet letters full of dread;*
*Shaming words common as sand.*
*Scaring words from a bully’s brand.*
*Guilty words that came pre-canned.*
*Haunting words from those now dead;*
*Bootleg words from behind the shed.*
*Gossip words I wish I’d never spread;*
*“I told you so” words not worth your spit;*
*Goddamn words worse than shit;*
*Cutting words that widen the split.*

Words without consonants—you know where they led;
*Salad dressing words on white bread;*
*Pregnant words that never bled.*
*Words that run through southern blood.*
*Words I dare to drag through the mud*
*Powerful words freed after a flood.*

4-14 Sandy Roberts.

Roberts reminds us that as words shape our life, actually creating our world, they have a powerful impact on our interpretation of our life and world. We recognize at the end of the poem words become powerful when freed.

**THE PROCESS**

‘Transform your Health: Write to Heal’ is a process. It is typically facilitated over 6 – 8 weeks, meeting once a week, or can be facilitated over 3 days. ‘Leading Patients in Writing for Health’ is a retreat, facilitated over 3 days, which moves through the same process, experientially, but with greater depth in terms of how the process works, so that healthcare providers can understand the process through which they will be leading their patients or clients. They are also provided with the tools with which to create their own writing prompts and exercises, by learning the defining characteristics and guiding principles of the writing exercises. Several types and genres of writing are employed. These are expressive writing, transactional writing, poetic writing, (which includes poetry, and creative non-fiction), affirmative writing and legacy writing.

**Expressive Writing**

Our workshops begin with expressive writing. Expressive writing is the foundation of our work. The expressive writing experience in
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