

# Cancer and Comics: Exploring the Potential of Graphic Medicine in Interprofessional Education. Cora M. Olson, PhD; David Musick, PhD; David Trinkle, MD; Joalenn Tabor (Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine).

## Synopsis

Through scripting a collaborative comic on cancer, medical students explore multiple stakeholder positions related to cancer. This collaborative comic project involves the negotiation of each team members' perspective, reflection on these perspectives, and delving into the patient's experience and perspective on the illnesses encompassed with in the term "cancer."

## Background

- During the second week of the Interprofessional Block VII course, Issues in Medicine and Culture: A Course in Medical Humanities, we explore the illnesses that make up the term "cancer." Prior to class, the students are expected to read eight short personal narratives on cancer. One of these narratives is *Mom's Cancer* by Brian Fies—a graphic novel that depicts one family's struggles with their mother's brain cancer. Upon arrival to class, students form groups of 4-6. Then they are asked to draw a 9 panel comic depicting an experience with cancer. This comic may depict treatment, diagnosis, coping by the patient, family members or physician. It must tell a story.

## Methodology

The innovation uses graphic medicine and narrative medicine to promote group interaction and negotiation around a difficult topic.

The survey consisted of the following questions:

- What did you like about the Cancer Comic Collaboration (CCC) project?
- What would you change about the CCC project?
- How did this exercise help you makes sense of another person's perspective on cancer? Please, describe.
- Give an example of empathy displayed during the project.
- Please, describe how your group communicated and made decisions during the project.

## Results

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
discussion as enjoyment	nothing	people cope with cancer diagnoses differently/differing portrayals of cancer	attentiveness, respectful listening, shared stories	consensus (group brainstorming)
creative enjoyment	more time/draw out of class	need to speak carefully	cancer survivorship requires a longitudinal sense of empathy	consensus and delegation
enjoyed learning others' perspectives	different presentation style	self reflection	through the use of appropriate language by the provider to the patient (ex. child)	mayhem
cathartic	more direction/ guidance/examples	seeing the scientific and the lived experiences of cancer side by side	empathy displayed through visual illustration	point person/leader
disliked	emotional mismatch	it did not/missed the mark/readings and an essay would have been better	readings at the beginning and end of class elicited more empathy than the project	artistic encouragement
	make the survey anonymous		none	guided by the assigned readings

## Conclusions

- Graphic Medicine is a great resource and medium for medical students learning the Interprofessional domain.
- Students display understandings of patients' illness perspectives, reflect on their own views, values, and ethical beliefs as it relates to the topic, and they effectively communicate and collaborate with team members to form a single story.
- The project offers a low pressure space for exploring cancer diagnoses together from multiple perspectives.
- Further, graphic medicine may help foster emotional resilience in care providers.

### Barriers:

- Three attitudinal barriers were encountered in this project:
  - literalist or narrowly focused interpretations of the project
  - a general disdain for non-scientific perspectives in medical education
  - the medical (scientific) pragmatist perspective

### Addressing Community Needs:

- Care providers are community members. This project attempts to help future physicians tackle cancer diagnoses and provide them with a potential tool to combat compassion fatigue in doing so.

