

Take Two Sonnets and Call Me in the Morning

by Selby Lopez · June 18, 2018



Dr. John Harper



Dr. Larry Hergott



Dr. David Markham

Poetic physicians embrace healing potential of verse.

Dr. John Stone kept an inch-thick stack of notecards in his pocket wherever he went.

The late physician used them to record short observations, interactions, and people's mannerisms – information that could then be used for his second passion: poetry.

Stone shared his love for verse with former student Dr. David Markham, who sees similarities between the work of the poet and that of the doctor.

“A lot of the skills that go into writing poetry, solving problems, putting the words on the page, has a lot to do with the same skill set and the creativity that goes into solving problems and trying to figure out and delve into

someone's illness," Markham said. "That creativity of solving the problem is a lot the same."

Markham, a heart failure and transplant cardiologist at Emory University Hospital, joined other doctors in speaking April 23 at *Suffering and Joy: The Healing Power of Poetry* at [The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture](#).

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Markham said reading or exchanging poems and other pieces of literature with his patients is a way to connect with them on a personal level.

Dr. John Harper, a cardiologist affiliated with Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas, said he believes poetry can play a part in the healing process.

"Anything that is beautiful, lyrical works in a part of the brain that is pleasant and pleasing, and I think it does aid healing," Harper said. "I'm not here to say that you don't need medicine if you just listen to poetry, but I think anything that puts you in a more peaceful, thoughtful mindset, it may be helpful in healing."

The healing doesn't only extend to the patients. Poetry can be therapeutic for doctors by helping them cope with traumatic experiences on the job.

"Here's another reason poetry's important, and it's not a pleasant one: Recent studies have shown that between 35 and 50 percent of physicians have burnout, a sense of depersonalization, disillusion, and depression and many look at early retirement," Harper said. "We believe that poetry has the ability to get rid of some of this disillusion."

Dr. Lawrence Hergott, a medical professor at the University of Colorado, shared how poetry helped him cope with loss. His poem "The Teardrop Approach," details his experience suffering the loss of his son in a plane crash.

He said that it's important to share the gift of writing for the impact it may have on others.

Hergott shared a story of how his poem, "Some Years Having Passed Since I Lost You," helped a father who lost his daughter feel like he spent another minute with her.

"This is why we write," Hergott said. "Write for yourself and understand for yourself, but if you go beyond that – it's not to get published, it's not to be famous, it not for anything like that – it's for the writer. It's a gift."