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Editorial

Emergence – Brokenness and Creation

I always enjoy the act of gathering an editorial, an opportunity to take hold of the images and ideas that assemble by chance as writers and artists—often also patients or healthcare providers—converge within an issue of *Ars Medica*. They are the witnesses, the recorders, the sense makers of this moment in healthcare and the dreamers and visionaries that offer glimpses of a hoped-for future.

We seem to be at a moment of demarcation—a wilful, collective separation from the pandemic that has defined the last three years of healthcare and social experience. It has become strategic in academic journals, for example, to remove references to the Covid-19 pandemic as we attempt to move past it into a post-pandemic world. Journal editors erase the framing of the pandemic, putting red lines through phrases such as “the onset of Covid-19 highlighted,” “this pivot was the result of Covid-19,” and “the Covid-19 pandemic revealed.” Covid-19 theme issues are archived.

The writers and artists in this issue of *Ars Medica* are not ready to let the pandemic slip into forgetting. Instead, they continue to grapple with human and social experiences and losses, and the impact of the pandemic on citizens, patients, and healthcare providers, even as we struggle to emerge from this period. In “Do Not Call Me a Hero,” Hannah Opp turns an unflinching gaze on her own experience as a Community Liaison in a

senior living community during the pandemic that eroded her sense of herself as an advocate. Weathering frustrated insults that referred to her as a “jailer,” “Nazi,” and “murderer,” she flees from healthcare as a “refugee,” not simply burnt out, but “deeply broken” and still carrying “an insurmountable weight of mourning and guilt that I cannot seem to shake.”

The photo essay “D.I.N.O.,” on the front cover of the issue, by an international collective that includes Kate Ziqiu Wang (University of British Columbia), Leah Komer (University of Toronto), Ramesh Ali (Mayo Clinic), Taylor Carmichael (Western University), Stephanie Sioufi (Russell’s Hall Hospital, NHS), and Talha Khan (University of the West of England), also deals with an often-hidden aftermath of the pandemic. Through a sculpture made from discarded single-use gloves, they call attention to the burden of medical waste on the environment. The apparently whimsical figure of D.I.N.O—an apt reminder of climate change and extinction—belies the seriousness of this waste as it prompts the viewer to critically reconsider, “Did I Need One?”

Creation is how every contributor manages the weight of the experiences of transformation, loss, and uncertainty that they describe. Zed Zha, in “A Delivery Note,” feels the need to step outside of medical documentation that “reduce[s] all of this into the driest medical language,” and to approach it anew through creative writing. In “Touching at Depth During the Covid-19 Pandemic,” Kathleen Rice is moved as she learns something unexpected

through the words of research subjects. Zoe Kaplan uses her practice of “making up stories” to inhabit the embodied experience of amnesia. And in “A Grief in the Night,” Tom Boyce creates a poignant moment that vivifies existential questions about “the stinging sadness of life.”

Poets Telaina Eriksen, Deb O’Rourke, Dixie L. Partridge, and Hollis Roth all utilize the language and rhythms of poetry to make sense of loss, and to look beyond what Liana K. Meffert, in “Wednesday Night,” describes as “the body/ can’t hold it’s just/ a skin with four walls/ holding back blood, red water.” In a series of poems by Mary Frances Carney, the poet can grasp “the eternal appearance of life through what is changed and changing, and what has never changed at all.”

In “The Gold Earring: New York City on April 3, 2020, between 2:05 and 2:07 pm,” Lara Marcuse and Madeline Fields explicitly turn to fictional writing to counter the feeling of being “surrounded by death.” Through the voice of an unnamed dying woman, they give us a startling image:

Years ago, while walking in Inwood Hill Park, I saw countless small birds fly, at once and with no pause, through multiple holes in a chain link fence. It surprised me, I didn’t know it was possible. And at this moment, the moment of my own death, I feel as if the countless small birds of my mind fly, at once and without pause, out of my now lifeless body.

In this act of creation, at a moment in which we are all attempting to leave behind the strictures of the pandemic, this impossible flight is also one of imagination.

Paula Heister, in her poem “Kintsugi,” also allows for the sometimes ambivalent nature of this creative act. Kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery in a way that retains the sutures with precious metals and lacquer, is recalled explicitly only in the title. The roster of “discarded lives,” patients seen in the unnatural overnight light of an emergency room, are likened to “broken porcelain.” While in fragments, one sees in their “fractured edges/ their creator, indifferent.” Yet through the imaginative acts of both writer and reader, we can take on the role of a heedful creator that repairs—retaining brokenness in the emergence of something newly rendered as precious and beautiful.

Allison Crawford
Editor-in-Chief, *Ars Medica*