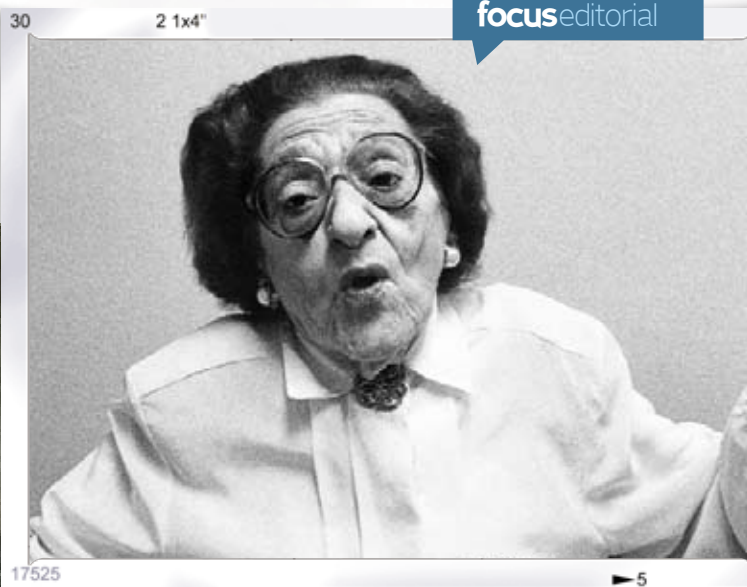


ARTS & HEALTH



World authorities on “creativity and health” will be in Port Macquarie in November to share experiences, offer training programs and discuss the hot topic in healthcare – “arts and health” – along with 500 conference delegates, drawn from around Australia. The Art of Health and Wellbeing conference is being convened by Arts and Health Australia, a national organisation, based in Port Macquarie.



Arts and Health” might seem like a relatively new concept to some people, but the restorative and healing powers of creativity have been recognised for literally thousands of years, as our own Aboriginal culture will attest. Now “arts and health” is widely acknowledged as a prescription for health and wellbeing, with broader applications for communities, and the scientific results are now there to prove it.

At the conference, Dr Cheryl Dileo, Professor of Music Therapy and Director of The Arts and Quality of Life Research Center at Temple University, Philadelphia, and Assistant Director, Dr Joke Bradt, will present scientific research on music and dance and their effectiveness in healthcare, especially for people with coronary heart disease, brain injury, anxiety conditions, cancer and at end-of-life.

Dr Dileo and Dr Bradt will also conduct a 3-day pre-conference course Artists in Healthcare, to equip 15 musicians and 15 visual artists with preparatory skills for working in hospitals, schools, community centres and other healthcare facilities.

One ground breaking piece of scientific research in the area of arts and health is the study to quantify the impact of professional arts programming on people’s life quality aged 65 years and over. Led by psychiatrist Dr Gene Cohen in collaboration with Susan Perlstein and others, the breakthrough paper is titled: “The impact of professionally conducted cultural programs on the physical health, mental health, and social functioning of older adults” (The Gerontologist, Vol. 45, No. 6, 726-734).

Susan Perlstein, who founded the National Center for Creative Aging, in Washington DC, will report on the findings of this historic research project at the conference. As well, Susan will provide insights into developing arts and health programs for older people, drawing on her experience as founder and director of Elders Share the Arts which has been run since 1979 in New York.

Susan’s visit to Australia has been sponsored by the Department of Health and Ageing and following the conference, Susan will travel to Canberra with Margret Meagher, Director of Arts and Health Australia, to brief the Office for an Ageing Australia and peak health and community organisations about the value of “Creative Ageing”.

The National Endowment for the Arts has supported many arts and health programs and research projects in the US. In an exclusive address in Australia, Paula Terry, NEA’s Director, Office for AccessAbility, will showcase best-practice arts and health programs in the US, including programs in hospitals (adults and children), aged care facilities, schools and community services at the conference.

Creative Ageing is also a theme in the keynote presentation by Dr Jeffrey Levine, geriatrician and photographer from New York. Dr Levine explains: “As a physician who specializes in geriatrics, I have cared for and have been touched by many older people. As a photographer, my images show a side of human life that our culture has conditioned us to turn away from. We live in a society that marginalizes the elderly. Wrinkles and stooped gait, once emblems of dignity and wisdom, often elicit avoidance and disdain. The paradox is that we are all aging, and the aged are none other than ourselves. My show, ‘Aging Through a Physician’s Lens’, is a retrospective of 20 years of photographing older people. My goal was to challenge stereotypes, reformulate our perceptions of growing old, and inspire caregivers to enter this challenging and rewarding field.”

The Museum of Modern Art in New York is synonymous with “the best of the best” in terms of contemporary art but MoMA is also highly regarded for its outstanding range of community access programs for people with disabilities; hospitalised children/adults; people who are homebound; blind and partially sighted visitors; teenage parents; cancer survivors; and individuals with mental illness and dementia. One of MoMA’s major social initiatives is its Art and Alzheimer education program, recognising the power of art to enrich and satisfy those without full access to memory, while providing support for their carers.

In Port Macquarie, MoMA’s Carrie McGee will conduct workshops in concert with Adriane Boag, from the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra to equip healthcare professionals and community workers with ways of making art accessible to people with Alzheimer’s disease. Carrie and Adriane will be joined by Margaret Allen from Alzheimer’s Australia (NSW) who runs an Art and Alzheimer’s program locally.

Interestingly, the programs at MoMA were first

established to respond to the needs of veterans from the Second World War in 1944. Addressing the issue of veteran’s health are at least four further speakers at the conference. Bonnie Graves is the Arts Chair for the American Red Cross at Madigan Army Medical Center, Seattle. While visiting Port Macquarie, Bonnie will meet with local organisations dedicated to suicide prevention, mental health and veterans’ health.

Moya Sayer-Jones will present her popular workshop on story-telling at the conference and draw on the success of her books, including “Beyond the Call”, a book of stories that celebrates the experiences and resilience of Australian veterans with mental health and substance abuse issues, and the way in which their partners and families have supported them.

Naj Wikoff, from the Society for the Arts in Healthcare, heads New York’s Creative Healing Connections which offers retreats for women living with cancer and other chronic diseases and women from the US military, returning from war in the Middle East. Naj has written extensively on arts and health, including the monograph “The Arts in Times of Trauma”.

In his keynote address, Naj will canvass the “Future of the Arts in Healthcare” and argue for the business case for arts and health in “an incredibly challenging budget-driven environment”. Naj argues that “the arts are proving to be a cost effective method of helping to relax patients, reduce the experience of pain, reduce stress and encourage behaviour change”. Naj also points to the high cost of staff burnout and turnover and the value of the arts in keeping staff motivated and healthy. It’s a lesson that has relevance for the general business community as much as for healthcare providers.

In the UK, there has been close collaboration between the arts and health at a national government level. Keynote speaker Clive Parkinson is Director of Arts for Health at the Manchester Metropolitan University and works with Arts Council England and the Department of Health to better understand the health impact of creativity, culture and the arts. Clive led the three-year research project “Invest to Save: Arts in Health”, a comprehensive survey of public health, from reducing obesity and numbers who smoke, through to improving

sexual and mental health.

In his keynote address, Clive will explore notions of elitism and investigate how the arts and health agenda can better communicate its positive health message through the media. As he remarks: “For many, arts and health is a given; we’re passionate about the intrinsic value of the arts and we believe in the power of creativity and the arts to transform individuals and communities. But we need to understand that some people just don’t want to ‘get’ the arts, and more than that, the tabloid press positively relishes the opportunity to accuse health and social services of wasting money on the arts. The popular press has a real role in influencing the public health agenda.”

Clive will also facilitate the session “Show and Tell: Film, Sound and New Media”. Local doctor, Kimberley Ivory, who now works with Family Planning Victoria, will be presenting with her colleague Mark Camilleri, exploring sexual health issues through the film “Why’s it Called Gay”.

Other British authorities on art and community health at the conference, include Mike White and arts and health practitioner, Alison Clough, who has collaborated with GPs, schools and social care professionals to address community health issues such as smoking, mental health and coronary heart disease. In 1997, Alison opened the drop-in facility Looking Well Centre on a shoe-string budget and has now raised over £1 million to ensure its long term sustainability. As a 2008 recipient of Western Australia’s Healthway International Arts in Health Fellowship, Alison also worked with indigenous communities, exploring issues around diabetes for the Western Desert Kidney Health Project.

The conference is rich in content and boasts a panel of presenters of extremely high calibre.

The Art of Good Health and Wellbeing international arts and health conference at the Glasshouse Arts Conference and Entertainment Centre, Port Macquarie, from 10 to 13 November 2009, boasts a panel of presenters of extremely high calibre. For more details log on to: www.artsandhealth.org, email info@artsandhealth.org or telephone: 02 6583 5040.

Images above: “Herophilus” (detail), Artist Gary Hallman, Boynton Health Service, University of Minnesota
Naj Wikoff, Society for the Arts in Healthcare
“Ethel”, photograph © Jeffrey Levine (all rights reserved)