

The HEAL STORY

José E. Rodríguez, MD, Founding Faculty Editor of HEAL

As I sit here in the cold winter morning, I see snow on my lawn, its growing mass moving slowly towards my swimming pool. It is the first week of December, and I am far away from the place that HEAL was born. Yet, inexplicably, I feel very close to this wonderful publication, and the voice it gives to patients, staff, students, and faculty.

We started in 2008—almost 11 years ago. Our first print version came out in 2009. But that story is too simple, too easy. As I remember our beginnings, I remember images that inspired me. I remember students—now attending physicians with accomplishments far greater than my own—and I remember benefactors. I also remember making mistakes—both in teaching, and in HEAL. Yet time seems to make the good memories stronger, and the details of the mistakes become less obvious over time. For that I am grateful.

The image that stands out in my mind is this one:

Dr. Jared Rich, then a first-year student, produced this work of art as a part of a ceremony that the first-year medical students ran every year to remember the people who had donated their bodies for anatomy lab. During this memorial, students recite poetry, play music, share artwork, and honor the sacrifices of the donors. It was a touching ceremony, and I was amazed by the talent shown there.

I remember thinking these talents needed to be shared far beyond the walls of the medical school. I also remember what was obvious to the medical students: There is healing in art and joy in writing. I remember carrying a binder everywhere, with the artwork, the stories, and the poetry of medical students, thinking, “We need to make a magazine.” Fortunately, I don’t have to remember everything. In 2011, in Volume 3 of HEAL, we actually published the founding story. I will quote it here:

“HEAL was born in desperation. I had been an observer and participant in medical education for about 10 years when I began to feel a little burnt out. Not that I did not love teaching—I do. Nor did I hate seeing patients—I live for it. But I had been exposed to a darker side of what was a beautiful and inspiring career. A wise mentor had told me, “José, our career is sick. It is your job to ‘heal’ the career.” I had the idea of starting a creative writing group with the students, to try and direct their



Hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitae
This is the place where death delights to help the living

Jared Rich '08

energies toward creativity and self-expression. I thought that if they shared their stories, they would grow closer to others. I hoped that it would help them respect and love those who were different from them and needed their help.”

Dr. Amanda Percy and Dr. Jordan Rogers took the lead among the students, during their first and second years of medical school. This is what Dr. Rogers wrote in 2011:

“I had always dreamed of writing something that mattered to people, something that told the story of caring for patients from the perspective of people across the spectrum of medicine. Teaming up with Amanda Percy, who was a classmate of mine, we all came to the same conclusion: we needed to pursue making our ideas into a reality. Amanda came up with the name HEAL: Humanism Evolving through Arts and Literature, and worked tirelessly to make HEAL happen. . . The amazing tales of patients, families, and even colleagues that unfurled through the creation of HEAL has and continues to be an astounding and wonderful part of my medical career.”

Dr. Zach Folzenlogen, who started med school the year after Drs. Percy and Rogers, became the art director for the journal. He had a previous career at The Miami Herald doing similar work, and his passion presented the work of his classmates in an astoundingly beautiful and professional way.

As with all things creative, we needed to get money to further this dream. Dr. Percy, Dr. Rogers, and I applied for and received a grant from the Arnold P. Gold Foundation—funding the publication of 2 newsletters and 200 print copies. Dr. Lisa Granville, then Associate Chair of the Department of Geriatrics and Principal Investigator for the Reynolds Grant, saw this as an opportunity, and she formed a coalition with the Chair of Geriatrics, then Dr. Ken Brummel-Smith, the dean, Dr. J. Fogarty, and the Reynolds Foundation and made possible the publication of the first 1000 copies of HEAL. To me, this was miraculous. It was more than I dreamed possible. And those 1000 copies disappeared rapidly. We distributed the first copies around the December holidays. I remember dressing up as Santa Claus, and passing them out to the staff, the students, and the faculty. It was a gift.

Funding remained a challenge for only a few months after that. Dr. Jeanine Edwards joined our faculty as the chair of Medical Humanities and Social Sciences. Once she saw the journal, she made it a permanent fixture, funding both the annual publication as well as recruiting Dr. Tana Jean Welch, who continues to edit and manage the journal today. Dr. Folzenlogen graduated from medical school in the fourth year of HEAL, and it became necessary to find a new “art director.” The medical school had just formed an Instructional Design division of the Office of Medical Education, led by Dr. Shenifa Taite. They graciously took on the art direction of the journal, and Mark Bauer, HEAL’s current designer, does an excellent job.

Three years ago, HEAL became permanently funded by the Jules B. Chapman and Annie Lou Chapman Private Foundation, whose unprecedented generosity has made it possible for HEAL to continue to bless the lives of patients, staff, students and faculty. We are very grateful to them for noticing us, and for making HEAL part of the fabric of our institution.

The Department of Family Medicine and Rural Health played an essential role in the creation of HEAL. I was a full time faculty member in that department while at FSU, and under the leadership of Dr. Dan Van Durme, then chair, I was allowed the time to bring HEAL to light. The department also hired essential personnel—Drs. Taite and Welch, to name a few—that ensured the survival of HEAL.

What started out as the story of HEAL seems to have morphed into a “thank you note.” This journal has been a labor of love, and one that I hold dear to my heart, even though I have moved on. HEAL gave me my voice in poetry and short stories. It also was the first publication where I served as editor-in-chief. Since its inception, I have been more active in creating poetry than at any point in my life. I have since produced a book of poetry for my family and have attempted to write my autobiography in verse. I still write essays 4-6 times per year for blogs and for journals and HEAL gave me the courage to do so.

I would like to congratulate HEAL on its 10th anniversary. In 2008 I knew it was possible, but I did not believe it was probable. I am delighted that I was wrong. May HEAL continue to bless all of our lives, and may it continue to be a place of expression, of healing, of sharing, and of love for generations to come. ■

10 YEARS LATER