



# INSIDE NINR

MARCH 2004

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## INSIDE SCOOP

- The NIH Telephone and Service Directory is now published on-line, [teledirectory.nih.gov](http://teledirectory.nih.gov). Bookmark and save for your files.
- Mark your calendars: NIH Share the Health Exposition, Saturday, April 24th, 10-3:30, at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, MD.

## New York Workshop Links Healing, Humanities, and Art



By Ray Bingham

*Editor's note: Ray Bingham, author of 40 articles in nursing journals, was invited to attend a BLR Humanities Panel by Dr. Diane Mason, editor-in-chief of the American Journal of Nursing.*

*Ray also attended the Nurses and Narrative Conference at the invitation of Health Affairs.*

Bellevue Hospital in New York City, chartered in 1731, is the oldest public hospital in the United States. In 2001, it is also became the first and only hospital to sponsor a literary journal, the *Bellevue Literary Review*. According to its editor, Dr. Danielle Ofri, the *BLR* "straddles the world of literature and medicine, with the implicit assumption that literature...is integral to healing."

On Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, the *BLR* sponsored a literary program on "Humanities, arts, & healing." With Dr. Ofri serving as moderator, four panelists read selected pieces and discussed how their selections related to their work, their teaching, or their lives.

Dr. Felice Aull, a medical professor, read a poem entitled "Monday." She said that she often gives this poem to her beginning medical students. The author, Marc Straus, an

oncologist, tells about attending a conference with his wife. While she is busy attending lectures, he has time to walk alone, stirring memories of treating his father who was dying of liver failure and sepsis, and of his new patient dying of prostate cancer. It starts, "Miami Beach: Everyone is eighty-two. Fourteen men walking on the boardwalk look exactly like my father."

Courtney Davis, a women's health nurse practitioner, read a poem by Krystina Ahlman, RN, that opened with the question "why be a nurse," and concluded with "I am not afraid to cry." Through her shift, the nurse in the poem suffers "a thousand tiny failures," from tending to the wife of her elderly patient who died, to being vomited upon by a young woman alcoholic, to being cursed by the stressed husband of a cancer patient. Yet at the end of the day, she still feels carried by the human spirit of her patients.

Ruthann Robson, a poet and a lawyer, was told in 1998 that she had an inoperable tumor and 6 weeks to live. However,

she found a surgeon to operate, and survived. The poem she read was entitled "Perspective." In it, she tells of how, shortly after receiving her diagnosis, she had to call her plumber, who himself suffered from lymphoma, for a stopped-up sink. As he struggled ever deeper to reach the clog, she became worried, and asked him if it was a serious problem. He answered, "you of all people should know this: it's only plumbing."

Carol Zoref, a writing professor from Manhattan, read an excerpt from her essay, "Visual anguish and looking at art," which was published in the commemorative September, 2002, issue of *BLR*. She wrote, "I am waiting to feel different and waiting itself makes me feel out of control, as out of control as I felt watching those flame-engulfed towers collapse...I notice in The New York Times, where every article now reads like an obituary, a review of an exhibit." Going to the exhibit,



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## HEALING, HUMANITIES, &amp; ART (CONT.)

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she finds photographs of religious monuments from around the world. "Each photograph is an invitation to a reciprocity of experience, rather than something done to the viewer, as with the bombings." The renewal she felt through allowing her mind to focus on art became "central to my feeling alive."

Following the readings, the audience had many questions and comments. Discussions included exploring the connection between the act of writing and the act of healing for both the patient and the health profession, the place of literature in the education of nurses and physicians, the differences and

similarities between narrative writing and qualitative research, the use of poetry therapy, and the value of feedback gained from readers.

I walked back to my hotel that evening through the crowded, busy, and well-lit streets of New York with much to think about from a very stimulating program.

As a personal postscript: The following morning, I had some time before my return train trip, so I visited Central Park. Walking up a trail on the west side, I came across a sign by a small, open area that read "Strawberry Fields." A child of the 60s and a lifelong Beatles fan, the origin of

the name was clear to me, but its significance took a little longer to sink in. I would find out later that the Dakota, the building where John Lennon lived, and in front of which he was murdered, was right across the street. That quiet morning, however, I walked alone up the path, past the plaque listing the many countries who contributed to this small garden to peace. At the top of the rise, set into the walkway, I found the tile mosaic, ringed as it apparently often is by a circle of flowers and notes from those who remember, and containing a single word.



## E-Mail Mysteries?

## E-Clips

Every workday, the News Media Branch of the NIH Office of the Director compiles articles from various newspapers that are pertinent to the NIH administrative, policy, and research communities. Those news clippings made available by email. If you are interested in receiving these daily "E-Clips", please notify Mark Waldo, 301/496-0236.

Unless you're writing a mystery novel via e-mail, don't keep your reader in suspense.

Although most e-mail messages are short (in most workplaces, probably 80% are fewer than seven lines long), readers often have a problem getting the main point.

The Solution. State your main point, your "bottom line," early in the first paragraph of your message.

Putting your bottom line where the reader can quickly see it is a basic technique for clear business communication. It applies to all types of documents as well as presentations, but it is especially effective for e-mail messages.

*from The Safe Side of the Send Button by Dees Stallings*

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*Public Sector Institute/Federal Business Council eMagazine  
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## Email Etiquette

When we use symbols or other devices simply to "liven up" our messages, we leave our meaning (and sometimes our intent) open to interpretation.

*Dees Stallings*