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Theater of Witness: The Patient Experience of Dementia Shared through Testimonial Performance

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**Theater of Witness: the patient experience of dementia shared through
testimonial performance**

Salena Cui

Abstract:

Introduction: Dementia is a condition that modern medicine is ill-equipped to address, and to which art may have much to offer. This project combines reflective and creative processes in a theater collaboration between patients, caregivers, and healthcare students. The goal was to explore the ways in which theater can heal, and to better understand the patient experience of dementia.

Methods: I worked with Teya Sepinuck on this project. We met with participants individually to conduct interviews about personal stories and held group workshops to explore our collective story. We worked with a percussionist and composer to explore accompanying music. We have been collaborating with participants to write scripts and develop choreography. We will perform the final piece in mid-September 2019.

Results: This project has brought healing to its participants in different ways. As a group, we noticed unexpected connections between each other's stories. Music became a powerful shared language, growing into a cornerstone of the project. Finally, every participant seemed to find catharsis in sharing their story, even if they were sharing of suffering, and vulnerability made way for love and healing.

Discussion: Working on this piece has taught me lessons that I will carry on my path towards practicing medicine. Most notably, reflecting on my own story helped me notice connections between my life and the lives of other participants. This helped me empathize with people who were of different generations and cultures. I will remember the importance of knowing my own story and asking others about their stories.