

# THE MESSENGER

NEWS OF THE RIGHTCARE MOVEMENT



April 14, 2017

The Lown Institute Conference, *Beyond the Bottom Line: Defending the Human Connection in Health Care* will take place on **May 5-7, 2017** in Boston, MA. The full conference agenda is available for viewing [here](#). Don't miss your chance to experience three exciting days of learning and right care advocacy – [Register now!](#) This activity has been approved for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™*. This activity is awarded ANCC credit. See [registration page](#) for specific details.

## *Medical students go 'beyond illness' in roundtable discussions*

What does it mean to be a clinician in the 21st century, and how can medical education equip students to reach this evolving ideal of a modern health professional? In the [Beyond Illness](#) roundtable series, a collaboration between [In-Training](#) and the [Right Care Alliance](#), medical students across the U.S. led discussions on these questions. The first three essays from Beyond Illness Roundtables at Georgetown University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Illinois-Chicago are available to read on the In-Training website [here](#).

Common themes among students at the roundtables included frustration at the stifling bureaucracy in medical schools; feeling as though essential elements of health care such as patient empowerment, empathy, and social determinants of health are merely given lip service; and feeling pressure to compete against fellow students. These essays stress the urgent need to transform medical education, from a rigid, grade-obsessed culture to one that adapts to student needs, and fully integrates social justice principles.

“Our school feels full of clinicians and educators committed to changing healthcare and medical training. Yet, the national, overly standardized structure of medical education handcuffs innovators, makers and game changers,” write Georgetown Medical School Students **Jack Penner** and **Michael Pappas** in their reflective [essay](#). They found the roundtable a refreshing opportunity to temporarily look past these boundaries and speak honestly about what they want from their medical education. “Without concern for grades or professors’ perceptions, students’ authenticity broke through as they laid out their version of an ideal physician and improved healthcare culture.”

For third-year medical students at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, the roundtables allowed them to look past the “canned answers” they had been told about what makes a good physician. It is not enough to be know that doctors are supposed to be “sensitive, empathetic, and good listeners,” **Yuli Zhu** recounts in her In-Training [essay](#). Zhu and her colleagues identify nuance as a crucial element of right care. They discussed the ways they can take a more nuanced approach in their own practice – taking a thoughtful history of the patient before ordering a “barrage of lab panels,” listening to patients’ preferences instead of assuming that there is a single correct treatment plan, and being aware of “subtle balances of power” in the doctor-patient relationship.

We look forward to hearing more experiences from the Beyond Illness Roundtables. If you are interested in holding your own roundtable session at your medical school, contact [organize@lowninstitute.org](mailto:organize@lowninstitute.org).



*1 Michael Pappas (right) in breakout session at the RCA Leadership Training*

## ***Dancing in a different direction***

By Karen Krolak, Founder and Artistic Director of Monkeyhouse dance company

There is a moment in Marc Brew's dance quartet, *Divide*, where the dancer Lani, who has been standing on the shoulders of another dancer, Carina, falls forward. People in the audience audibly gasp as she gives in to gravity. A third dancer, James, swoops in to catch her mere seconds before she hits the floor and she effortlessly flips back up to standing.



*2Karen Krolak supporting Nicole Harris on her back during a performance at Cool NYC Dance Festival.*

Can you picture this moment in your head?

Now adjust that image to include a detail that I have intentionally omitted: the wheelchair. The one that Carina began using after an accident a few years ago. Seeing Lani towering over Carina's head feels much more daring when you envision those wheels slowly gliding over the stage. Lani's confidence as she plunges forward is breathtaking in part because she only has one hand to catch herself if James does not arrive in time. Lani's left arm extends only a few inches beyond her shoulder.

Perhaps I should have begun by explaining that Carina, James, and Lani are members of [Axis](#), a contemporary dance company based in Oakland whose mission is to change the face of dance and disability through artistry, engagement and advocacy. By withholding this information, however, I wanted to point out common biases about dance.

What kinds of bodies do we expect to see on stage? Who can or should dance? These questions are vitally important to me as a choreographer, performer, and teacher especially since I wrestle with a constellation of rare symptoms related to a chronic inflammatory disease. When intense pain erupts unpredictably in my chest, for example, it can be awkward to guide a room full of eight-year-olds through dance combinations. It can be almost impossible to do anything other than crumple into a moaning mess on the floor. There are many days where I feel like I want to give up dance. But rather than make me quit, my health challenges have forced me to view dance in a radically new way.

When I began ballet lessons in the basement of a church in Nashville 41 years ago, I was motivated purely by my goal to become a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader. (I was four, so cut me a tiny amount of slack, please!) I continued dancing throughout college, where I realized that I could be a professional choreographer. Little did I know that dance was not just a form of self-expression and potential career path, but it was saving my life. When I began feeling symptoms from granulomas (tissue inflammations) in 2003, I went to the doctor for a CT scan. My physicians were stunned at the results, because the scan showed a high level of cardiovascular health, despite the granulomas. They wondered whether my teaching and rehearsing dance several days a week was the thing keeping me alive and healthy.

Their comments have encouraged me to dig deeper into the connections between dance and health. Through neurology research and initiatives like [Dance for PD](#), doctors are discovering that dance can create new neural pathways. Dance can also positively influence mental health by [decreasing anxiety](#).

When I read **Vikas Saini's** piece in [STAT](#) about the importance of listening, I knew I wanted to learn more about the Right Care Alliance. From my experiences with dance and chronic illness, I know how big a difference good doctor-patient communication can make. I envision a world in which all doctors and patients have a deep, honest conversation about their goals and treatment options. Where dance and other forms of self-expression are seen as medicine. And where no one is excluded from these activities because of their health status, and more dance companies like Axis can show the potential that dance can unlock in our bodies and the beauty any body can express.

## ***Words of Wisdom from Marshall Ganz***

Last week, Right Care Boston members attended an event organized by [Harvard Medical School Indivisible](#) and hosted by three Harvard health institutions, to discuss health organizing in Boston. The keynote speaker was **Marshall Ganz, PhD**, Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and organizing pioneer. Ganz gave his story of self, speaking about his upbringing and experience volunteering with the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project. He then provided a brief introduction to organizing, including the importance of building relationships, leadership teams, and strategizing. Throughout the talk and at the Q&A following, he gave advice to those organizing for health. We've collected a few words of wisdom from that talk below, and you can watch a video of the event [here](#).

### **Creating a strategy:**

“A strategy is using what you have to get the power you need to create change. If you don't have a lot of resources, you have to compensate with resourcefulness, creativity, solidarity, and determination.”

“The outcomes you are working toward have to be specific. If you can't count it, it doesn't count. You need a way to learn after each action, so there has to be a way to measure the outcome.”

### **The importance of conflict:**

“Fear of conflict can stop us in our tracks, but without conflict there is no growth and no change. To fear conflict is to fear change. Make the conflict constructive, make it creative.”

### **Getting started:**

“You won't know everything before you start the process. We begin to build our road by walking it.”

This week's Organizing Hero is **Robin Strongin**, who has been helping with the Right Care DC Science March by ordering t-shirts and hosting pre-march events. Go Robin!

*Do you have questions about starting a chapter or strategizing with your team? Email Stephanie Aines at [organize@lowninstitute.org](mailto:organize@lowninstitute.org).*

## ***Announcements***

- The Right Care Alliance is marching for science on Earth Day, **April 22**, in 10 cities across the country! See the [Facebook page](#) for the full list. If you want help organizing a group of Right Care Alliance members to march in your city, email [organize@lowninstitute.org](mailto:organize@lowninstitute.org).
- If you are attending the March for Science and still need a **T-shirt**, please contact [jcolucci@lowninstitute.org](mailto:jcolucci@lowninstitute.org) to buy a shirt (or two or three).

