

Episode: *Author Interview: “Using Music to Teach Health Professions Students to Listen Closely and Promote Peace”*

Guest: Timothy Nicholas, MA

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Tim Nicholas, a third-year medical student at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland, Ohio, and the co-editorial fellow for this month’s issue of the Journal. He’s here to discuss his article, coauthored with Drs Lisa Rainsong and Erin Gentry Lamb, “*Using Music to Teach Health Professions Students to Listen Closely and Promote Peace*,” in the November 2024 issue of the Journal, [Peace in Health Care](#). Tim, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

TIM NICHOLAS: It’s great to be here. Thanks for having me.

[00:00:51] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point that you and your coauthors are making in your article?

NICHOLAS: Yeah, I think really what Dr Lamb and Dr Rainsong and I were really trying to hone in with this piece was that close listening is a critical skill that’s required of all clinicians, not simply physicians. And that specifically when considering the medical education of close listening skills and attitudes, the musical arts are a rich repository of pedagogies and practices and behaviors, attitudes and so forth that we believe can be applied in the medical environment to teach listening skills and attitudes.

[00:01:29] HOFF: And so, what should your fellow health professions students and trainees take from this article specifically?

NICHOLAS: So I think that the most important thing for health professions students, trainees, everyone really, to pull from this article is just the concept that musical arts, the musical arts are already ubiquitous in human culture. I think it’s upwards to 70 percent of medical students have some form of formal musical training. We have so much music all around us that’s, I think, demonstrated in the number of a cappella groups, and choirs and especially at Case Western, we have Doc Opera, other theater programs that really, at least for me, demonstrate how prevalent music is throughout medical cultures. And so, it’s this kind of low-hanging piece of fruit for us, that despite its ubiquity, is still rather underutilized. I think it’s only 3 percent of all arts and humanities modalities currently used in medical education are from the musical arts discipline. And

so, with so many students and so many of us having these cross-cultural and shared connections through music, what better way to teach these physician or clinician close listening skills and attitudes than through the use of the musical arts? So, the most important thing for health professions students or trainees might be to remember just to consider ways that we might be able to expand the use of the musical arts in medical education, and specifically, ways that we could use the musical arts to teach physician close listening or clinician close listening skills and attitudes specifically.

[00:03:03] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to this article that you didn't have the time or space to fully explore, what would that be?

NICHOLAS: If we could clarify one thing, I think it would've been first to clarify that we're not saying that music is the only way to teach these clinician close listening skills. But we do believe that it would've been nice to be able to accentuate and really dig deeper into the opportunity that really is this co-construction of patient experience of illness that happens in the very vulnerable health care setting and the tremendous responsibility and honor, the privilege that it is to have that role to be able to co-construct that experience and amplify or minimize peace for patients. This is something that we really believe deserves more attention in medical education. And so, being able to educate those specific behaviors and attitudes that operationalize those empathic tendencies that make patients feel heard and respected and at peace, that really is something that we would've. [theme music returns] And hopefully here, I'm able to really hammer down a little bit more.

[00:04:16] HOFF: Tim, thank you so much for being on the podcast and for your multiple contributions to the Journal this month.

NICHOLAS: Yeah, thank you so much.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, [journalofethics.org](http://journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.