

Episode: *Author Interview: "Songwriting and Youth Self-Concept"*

Guest: Wendy Stewart, MD, MMEd, PhD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

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 format for accessing the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Wendy Stewart, a pediatric neurologist and associate professor and the assistant dean of preclerkship education and director of humanities at Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick in Canada. She's here to discuss her article, coauthored with Dr Sophia Miao, *Songwriting and Youth Self-Concept*, in the July 2022 issue of *The Journal*, [Arts-Based Research in Health Care](#). Dr Stewart, thank you so much for being on the podcast today. [music fades]

DR WENDY STEWART: Thank you. Thanks for inviting me.

HOFF: To begin with, what's the main ethics point of your article?

STEWART: I think it touches in on some of the challenges that youth face and the difficulties in dealing with mental health issues at that age, and also the lack of access to mental health resources. Often, it's difficult for children to access resources unless they're in crisis. And so, I feel like it's important to have opportunities that are innovative and use different perspectives and different approaches to engage youth before they actually have an underlying diagnosis. And so, catch them when they're maybe struggling a little bit, but not actually have a psychiatric diagnosis. And I feel that is an ethical dilemma for us, because I meet many children who are struggling, but they don't have a formal diagnosis. And if we could give them the help at that point, they could hopefully become healthy, whole adults.

HOFF: And what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from your article?

STEWART: Well, I've always felt that when we're in training and we first get into medicine and other health professions, we tend to get focused on the medical side of things rather than exploring other options. And so, just carrying on from some of the comments I've already mentioned that when it comes to mental health, getting that access to assess and care for children and youth can be really challenging because often, families and the children have no coverage. So, unless you're in crisis, it's very hard to get some help.

So, I'm hoping that this study and further work that we plan to do will demonstrate that the arts and humanities, and in this case, music, can offer innovative alternatives to enhance mental health in young people. And I really am hoping that more prolonged guided music interventions have the potential to shift some of the negative thought processes and automatic thinking that children can experience, and that engaging in this type of activity would prevent them developing a formal psychiatric diagnosis.

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

STEWART: Well, one of the challenges when you do a study and you've only got limited numbers of people and the time that you have available to do it, you amalgamate all the data. And so, it's always hard to capture the obvious, significant transformation that an individual might have in the study. And what we observed with some of the individuals was very exciting and convincing in terms of the potential impact this type of intervention could have. So, I'm hopeful as we do further work, that that will become more apparent. Because even things like fluctuations in mood or circumstances over a short time can influence the data, but over a longer time, that impact would be lessened, and we could see the full impact of the intervention itself. [theme music returns]

HOFF: Dr Stewart, thank you so much for your time today on the podcast and for you and your coauthor's contribution to the Journal.

STEWART: Thanks very much.

HOFF: To read the full article as well as the rest of the July 2022 issue for free, visit our site, [JournalofEthics.org](https://www.journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.