



National Centre for Arts and Health

Adelaide and Meath Hospital Dublin

incorporating the National Children's Hospital

**THE BENEFIT OF
CREATIVE WRITING FOR
PATIENTS IN A
CARDIAC REHABILITATION
DEPARTMENT**

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INTRODUCTION

The Adelaide & Meath Hospital employed a writer in residence from September 2004 to June 2005 to work with over 250 patients from various departments in the hospital. The writer worked with patients in Age Related Health Care, Cardiac Rehabilitation, Paediatrics and Psychiatry departments. An initial evaluation of the benefit of creative writing for patients in acute hospital was carried out and a book of patient poetry was published entitled *Patient Voices* (AMNCH, 2006).

In 2007 a further creative writing course was held specifically for patients from the Cardiac Rehabilitation department, following positive feedback from patients and staff as to the benefit of creative writing for patients. Previous patients reported that they found the sessions helpful in coping with their new life post trauma (Moss, 2006).

This paper sets out the results of a small evaluation of the benefit of creative writing for patients in a Cardiac Rehabilitation programme.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Creative Writing Sessions were offered to patients who had completed a Cardiac Rehabilitation programme at the hospital. The creative writing course was held from January to June 2007 and each session was one hour long. The sessions were offered to patients who had completed their rehabilitation programme in the year prior to the course and patients self referred to a ten week creative writing course as out patients. No previous experience of creative writing was required. Nicole O'Rourke was hospital writer in residence.

AIMS OF THE PROGRAMME

- To give patients an opportunity for self expression whilst in hospital
- To gain skills and new experiences while in hospital
- To reduce social isolation and build confidence
- To celebrate the talent of patients in our hospital
- To give patients a voice, a chance to express their individuality

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Macknew Heart Disease Health Related Quality of Life Questionnaire was chosen to measure changes in patients attending the creative writing course. Patients completed the questionnaire anonymously pre and post attending the course. A focus group was also held on the last day, to gain feedback as to perceived benefit of the course.

Six patients attended the course. Despite the small number of participants, we aimed to carry out an extensive evaluation to try and find out what benefit creative writing had for these patients upon completion of the Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MACKNEW HEART DISEASE HEALTH-RELATED QUALITY OF LIFE (HRQL) QUESTIONNAIRE

The Macknew HRQL questionnaire was designed and developed as one of the early heart disease specific HRQL instruments to capture patients' perceptions of their treatment. The Macknew inquires about how heart disease and treatment of heart disease affects subjective

HRQL and incorporates physical, emotional and social aspects of HRQL. In particular it aims to:

- Understand how patients with heart disease view their own health - how they perceive themselves in their daily lives and how they feel
- Examine the impact of heart disease and subsequent treatment on aspects of health that matter to patients
- Screen patients to target those who need care the most
- Help health care teams and their patients make treatment decisions
- Track the effects of treatment and changes in health condition over time in patients with heart disease

The Macknew HRQL Questionnaire was chosen because it tests a large range of relevant quality of life areas, which were anecdotally reported to have improved during the first creative writing course in the hospital.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CARDIAC REHABILITATION PROGRAMME.

Cardiac rehabilitation is a structured exercise and education programme designed to help patients recover from their heart event. It is a multi disciplinary approach to improve short term recovery and to promote long term changes in lifestyles. The programme involves activities such as a supervised and monitored exercise programme in a gym and a home exercise programme, education to help reduce risk factors for heart disease and to promote lifestyle changes; which will improve physical and mental health and psychological sessions to help patients adjust after their heart event.

The aims of the programme are to improve heart functions in general health, support patients in making long term changes in their lifestyle, increase their confidence and improve quality of life. The creative writing programme was supported by the Cardiac Rehabilitation Department who felt that participating in a creative writing group may offer additional benefit to patients attending the programme.

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

The goals of health and social care interventions in the field of ischaemic heart disease are placing increasing emphasis on patients' quality of life as well as quantity of life. An improvement in health-related quality of life (HRQL) is often a stated goal of many cardiac rehabilitation programmes and secondary prevention strategies. The identification or measurement of change in HRQL is, therefore, an important aspect of the evaluation of secondary prevention programmes in heart disease. An improvement in the health-related quality of life of people with heart disease is an important consideration in the assessment of treatment effectiveness (Dempster, Donnelly and O'Loughlin 2004).

A literature review of **OID and Google Scholar** revealed very few references to creative writing and cardiac rehabilitation. A number of books explore the role of writing as therapy (Bolton, 1999 and Mazza, 2003) as well as papers on writing therapy for the bereaved (O'Connor et al 2003), in an HIV clinic (Nye 1995) and drugs/alcohol services (Mazzoli 1984). However, no papers were found regarding creative writing as part of a cardiology service nor medical trials of the benefit of creative writing any health setting. **A systematic review is recommended to further explore the latest research in this area.**

RESULTS FROM THE EVALUATION

Five of the six patients completed the course and these findings, despite being a small sample, were used to ascertain what benefit, if any, the creative writing course had for patients with cardiac events.

(i) Results Of Macknew HRQL Questionnaire Results

Please see Appendix 1 for full results of the questionnaire.

The **key findings** from the Macknew HRGL Questionnaire were as follows:

1. **Fear and apprehension** Patients reported feeling less fear and apprehension post group.
2. **Feeling discouraged or down** At the beginning of the group patients felt discouraged, 'down' and restless more often than at the end of the group, when there was a change to more positive scores in these areas. Patients reported, post group that they felt 'in better spirits' and 'calmer'
3. **Self Confidence** Patients indicated increased feelings of confidence post group
4. **Worthlessness and inadequacy.** Patients indicated that their feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy were reduced post group
5. **Feelings of frustration.** Patients reported feeling less frustrated post group
6. **Feeling calmer.** Patients rated themselves as more able to calm themselves post groups.
7. There was some indication that patients felt **less limited physically** post group but overall there were **few physical changes** associated with participating in creative writing group.

In summary, this small study indicated that patients experienced a reduction in feelings of fear, frustration and worthlessness and an improvement in self confidence after participation in a creative writing course. It is important to note, however, that further research is needed with a larger cohort and stricter controls for other variables.

(ii) Results of Focus Group

Patients reported that they found the group helped their **confidence** and **socialising**. They found it of benefit to **mix with people with the same condition** and to **learn a new skill**. Some reported that the biggest impact of having a cardiac event was the **loss of confidence** they experienced. The benefit of creative writing for patients appeared, from this small initial study, to be of benefit in the areas of **social support and mental health** rather than physical benefit.

Qualitative feedback from the group indicated that patients found the **company of others with the same illness** important as well as the opportunity to **share experiences** and memories. They found creative writing a **stimulating activity** that offered a chance to think about good and bad memories and to change their routine and try something new. It may be helpful at a time of huge changes in lifestyle to offer arts based groups that allow **space for creative re-thinking and reflection**.

Some members of the group experienced greater tiredness at the end of the course than at the beginning. This is perhaps unsurprising given the demands of attending a new course with a new group of people. Such a commitment demands risk taking and courage in participants.

Please see Appendix 2 for further qualitative results from the focus group.

DISCUSSION

This was a **very small sample group of patients** and we would hope to carry out further research with a larger group of patients in future. However **initial indications** are that the **social and emotional aspects of recovering from cardiac events might be helped by arts groups such as creative writing courses**. Overall, participants found that creative writing helped to **boost self confidence** and **reduce feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy** and it would be useful to study this further.

This small evaluation indicated that creative writing sessions should be held for this group in the future and that **further research** should be undertaken with more patients to ascertain the benefit of the art form for this patient group and in acute hospitals in general. Although patients felt that creative writing helped their rehabilitation they were not able to specify exactly how. Further research would aim to examine this area more closely.

RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH

- Creative writing course to be made available to patients from the Cardiac Rehabilitation programme once a year
- Further research using Macknew HRQL questionnaire with larger sample of patients
- Systematic review of the literature and research regarding creative writing as part of acute hospital care and in particular as part of Cardiac Rehabilitation departments.
- Dissemination of findings to other cardiac services nationally, as the creative writing programme at AMNCH is a national innovation.
- Creation of another book of poetry by patients.

Please see Appendix 3 for an example of creative writing by a patient in the group.

For more information please contact:

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APPENDIX ONE

RESULTS OF MACKNEW HRQL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. In General, how much of the time during the last 2 weeks have you felt frustrated, impatient or angry

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
2	1 SOME OF THE TIME
1	3 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> HARDLY ANY TIME
1	1 NONE OF THE TIME

2. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt worthless or inadequate

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> SOME OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
2	2 HARDLY ANY TIME
1	2 NONE OF THE TIME

3. In the last 2 weeks, how much of the time did you feel very confident and sure that you could deal with your heart problem?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 ALL OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 SOME OF THE TIME
1	1 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
2	1 HARDLY ANY TIME
1	1 NONE OF THE TIME

4. In general how much of the time did you feel discouraged or down in the dumps during the last 2 weeks?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
2	1 SOME OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
1	1 HARDLY ANY TIME
1	2 NONE OF THE TIME

5. How much of the time during the past 2 weeks did you feel relaxed and free of tension?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
2	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> SOME OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A LITTLE OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> HARDLY ANY TIME

1 NONE OF THE TIME
 (N.B. No data available post test)

6. How often during the last two weeks have you felt worn out or low in energy?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 ALL OF THE TIME
1	1 MOST OF THE TIME
1	1 A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
3	<input type="checkbox"/> SOME OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	2 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> HARDLY ANY TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE OF THE TIME

7. How happy, satisfied or pleased have you been with your personal life during the last 2 weeks?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 VERY DISSATISFIED, UNHAPPY MOST TIMES
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 GENERALLY DISSATISFIED, UNHAPPY
2	2 SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED, UNHAPPY
1	1 GENERALLY SATISFIED, PLEASED
2	<input type="checkbox"/> HAPPY MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> VERY HAPPY MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> EXTREMELY HAPPY, COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE SATISFIED OR PLEASED

8. In general, how often during the last 2 weeks have you felt restless, or as if you were having difficulty trying to calm down?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
3	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> SOME OF THE TIME
1	1 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> HARDLY ANY TIME
1	3 NONE OF THE TIME

9. How much shortness of breath have you experienced during the last 2 weeks while doing your day-to-day physical activities?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> EXTREME SHORTNESS OF BREATH
2	<input type="checkbox"/> VERY SHORT OF BREATH
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> QUITE A BIT OF SHORTNESS OF BREATH
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 MODERATE SHORTNESS OF BREATH
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 SOME SHORTNESS OF BREATH
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 A LITTLE SHORTNESS OF BREATH
3	2 NO SHORTNESS OF BREATH

10. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt tearful, or like crying?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
1	1 SOME OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A LITTLE OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> HARDLY ANY TIME

4 4 NONE OF THE TIME

11. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt as if you are more dependent than you were before your heart problem?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> SOME OF THE TIME
1	1 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
2	1 HARDLY ANY TIME
1	3 NONE OF THE TIME

12. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt you were unable to do your usual social activities with or without your family?

PRE	POST
1	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
1	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 SOME OF THE TIME
1	2 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
1	1 HARDLY ANY TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 NONE OF THE TIME

(N.B. In some questions only 4 of the 5 participants completed the questions)

13. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt as if others no longer have the same confidence in you as they did before your heart problem?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
2	2 SOME OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A LITTLE OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 HARDLY ANY TIME
2	2 NONE OF THE TIME

14. How often during the last 2 weeks have you experienced chest pain while doing your-day-to-day activities?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> SOME OF THE TIME
1	2 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> HARDLY ANY TIME
3	3 NONE OF THE TIME

15. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt unsure of yourself or lacking in self-confidence?

PRE	POST
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> MOST OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
3	<input type="checkbox"/> SOME OF THE TIME
<input type="checkbox"/>	2 A LITTLE OF THE TIME

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1 | 1 | HARDLY ANY TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 | NONE OF THE TIME |

16. How often during the last 2 weeks have you been bothered by aching or tired legs?

- | PRE | POST | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 | ALL OF THE TIME |
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> | MOST OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 | A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME |
| 2 | 1 | SOME OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 | A LITTLE OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | HARDLY ANY TIME |
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> | NONE OF THE TIME |

17. During the last 2 weeks, how much have you been limited in doing sports or exercise as a result of your heart problem?

- | PRE | POST | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ALL OF THE TIME |
| 1 | 1 | MOST OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> | SOME OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 | A LITTLE OF THE TIME |
| 1 | 2 | HARDLY ANY TIME |
| 1 | 1 | NONE OF THE TIME |

18. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt apprehensive or frightened?

- | PRE | POST | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ALL OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | MOST OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> | SOME OF THE TIME |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> | A LITTLE OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 | HARDLY ANY TIME |
| 1 | 2 | NONE OF THE TIME |

19. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt dizzy or light-headed?

- | PRE | POST | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ALL OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 | MOST OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME |
| 1 | 1 | SOME OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | A LITTLE OF THE TIME |
| 1 | 1 | HARDLY ANY TIME |
| 3 | 2 | NONE OF THE TIME |

20. In general during the last 2 weeks, how much have you been restricted or limited as a result of your heart problem?

- | PRE | POST | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | ALL OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | MOST OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | SOME OF THE TIME |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> | A LITTLE OF THE TIME |
| 2 | 3 | HARDLY ANY TIME |
| 1 | 2 | NONE OF THE TIME |

21. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt unsure as to how much exercise or physical activity you should be doing?

PRE

-
-
-
-
- 1
- 3
- 1

POST

- ALL OF THE TIME
- MOST OF THE TIME
- 1 A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
- SOME OF THE TIME
- 2 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
- 1 HARDLY ANY TIME
- 1 NONE OF THE TIME

22. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt as if your family is being over-protective toward you?

PRE

-
- 1
- 2
-
-
-
- 2

POST

- ALL OF THE TIME
- MOST OF THE TIME
- 3 A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
- 1 SOME OF THE TIME
- A LITTLE OF THE TIME
- 1 HARDLY ANY TIME
- NONE OF THE TIME

23. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt as if you were a burden on others?

PRE

-
-
-
-
-
- 1
- 4

POST

- ALL OF THE TIME
- MOST OF THE TIME
- A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
- SOME OF THE TIME
- A LITTLE OF THE TIME
- 1 HARDLY ANY TIME
- 3 NONE OF THE TIME

24. How often during the past 2 weeks have you felt excluded from doing things with other people because of your heart problem?

PRE

-
-
-
- 1
- 1
- 1
- 2

POST

- ALL OF THE TIME
- MOST OF THE TIME
- A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
- SOME OF THE TIME
- 2 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
- HARDLY ANY TIME
- 3 NONE OF THE TIME

25. How often during the past 2 weeks have you felt unable to socialise because of your heart problem?

PRE

-
-
-
-
- 2
- 1
- 2

POST

- ALL OF THE TIME
- MOST OF THE TIME
- A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
- 1 SOME OF THE TIME
- 2 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
- HARDLY ANY TIME
- 2 NONE OF THE TIME

26. In general, during the last 2 weeks how much have you been physically restricted or limited as a result of your heart problem?

PRE

-
-
-
- 1
- 1
- 1
- 2

POST

- ALL OF THE TIME
- MOST OF THE TIME
- A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
- SOME OF THE TIME
- 1 A LITTLE OF THE TIME
- 3 HARDLY ANY TIME
- 1 NONE OF THE TIME

27. How often during the last 2 weeks have you felt your heart problem limited or interfered with sexual intercourse?

PRE

-
-
- 1
-
-
- 1
-
- 3

POST

- ALL OF THE TIME
- MOST OF THE TIME
- A GOOD BIT OF THE TIME
- 2 SOME OF THE TIME
- A LITTLE OF THE TIME
- HARDLY ANY TIME
- NONE OF THE TIME
- 3 NOT APPLICABLE

APPENDIX TWO

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK FROM FOCUS GROUP

What Did You Find Good About this Course?

- *The social aspect*
- *Helping to broaden our outlook and love of reading as well as writing*
- *Motivation, it gave me the urge to work at writing more.*
- *It opened up my mind - I never thought I would write because I cannot spell*
- *It gave me great confidence and was very interesting*
- *Feeling the same as other people was the best thing about this course*
- *It was wonderful for interacting with other people, it was informative and I learned a lot*

Do you feel the group benefited your health? If so how?

- *Certainly it gave me much more confidence in expressing myself*
- *Being part of the group benefited my mental health*
- *Mixing with people with similar cardiac problem encouraged me to get on with my life after the heart operation.*
- *The group was healing; it takes something out of you and puts it on to the paper.*

What could we improve on this course?

- *One hour is not a long enough course, we need more time.*
- *More courses like this*
- *Possibly intergenerational work putting older people together with younger people.*
- *The staff members are helpful and encouraging, it was informative and excellent, and it was an extremely good course well prepared.*

General comments

- *I felt so different to people and the rehab programme gave me backup and support, in this creative writing group I felt the same as other people*
- *It gave me insight and an opportunity to explain about my life and experiences so that people would understand me.*
- *The group was full of memories and life experiences, validating older peoples' experience and history*
- *In the last week I shared a story of post traumatic stress - I saw a bomb in the 1970's and was involved in rescuing people from that bomb. Every year I remember it but this year I wrote a story about it and found great relief.*
- *The group broadens your horizons and is like being thrown into a swimming pool and finding you can swim doing something totally new.*
- *The rehab group gave confidence and as a follow-through this creative writing programme opens another door.*
- *Having a cardiac problem lessens your confidence you are much more aware of your mortality, you need things to rebuild your confidence like this course.*
- *Being with other people in the group in the important bit. That and the creative writing brought me confidence.*
- *There is a question about psychology... where do these ideas come from? The ideas that we write about? There is both writing for its own sake and yet also the psychology behind what you write and releasing your inner most thoughts and feelings*

EXAMPLE OF POEM BY PATIENT IN GROUP

New Year's Eve in Hospital by Mr John Meyler

One New Year's Eve in a hospital ward, recovering from a serious heart problem, my family were visiting. There was a particular poignancy amongst them as they made ready to depart. Nurse had just announced the end of visiting, and my wife, two daughters and two sons (with a certain amount of sadness) wished me a happy new year as they departed.

Around 10 o'clock the lights were out and all was quiet. This was my first ever time to be away from my family on the last day of the year. The only sound was the gentle sound of snoring of the other patients. I was uneasy, not able to settle, just turning from one side to the other. I had told them that I would try to contact them by mobile but it would be touch and go whether I would be successful because of the night that was in it.

I checked the luminous dial of my watch for the hundredth time. At one minute to midnight, without warning, the night swooped in all lights came on. They were singing 'Happy New Year' to everyone. A hot toddy was dispensed to all and the best of all was the arrival of my whole family for the celebrations.

On leaving after visiting hours, my eldest daughter had mentioned to the night sister that this was the first New Years Eve that her parents had not being together in fifty years of marriage. The time of year had a particular significance as her mother had been born in Scotland. With special permission to return at midnight, my daughter had arranged for the whole family to arrive at midnight.

A night to remember.

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