

# Poems transform GPs' waiting rooms

Poetry can help patients feel more at ease in healthcare settings, writes Eileen Fursland

More and more GPs are discovering that poetry can play a role in their waiting rooms, spaces that can be impersonal and in which people often feel anxious or vulnerable.

Rogan Wolf, an independent social worker who has set up a project called Poems for the Waiting Room, says: 'You can feel small and belittled and a poem, if it does speak to you, can make you feel human again.'

Poems for the Waiting Room

supplies A4-sized posters of poems free of charge for display in healthcare settings.

So far, three collections have been produced. The most recent collection, on the theme of 'diversity', consists of 50 poems originally written in 30 different languages with their English translations alongside.

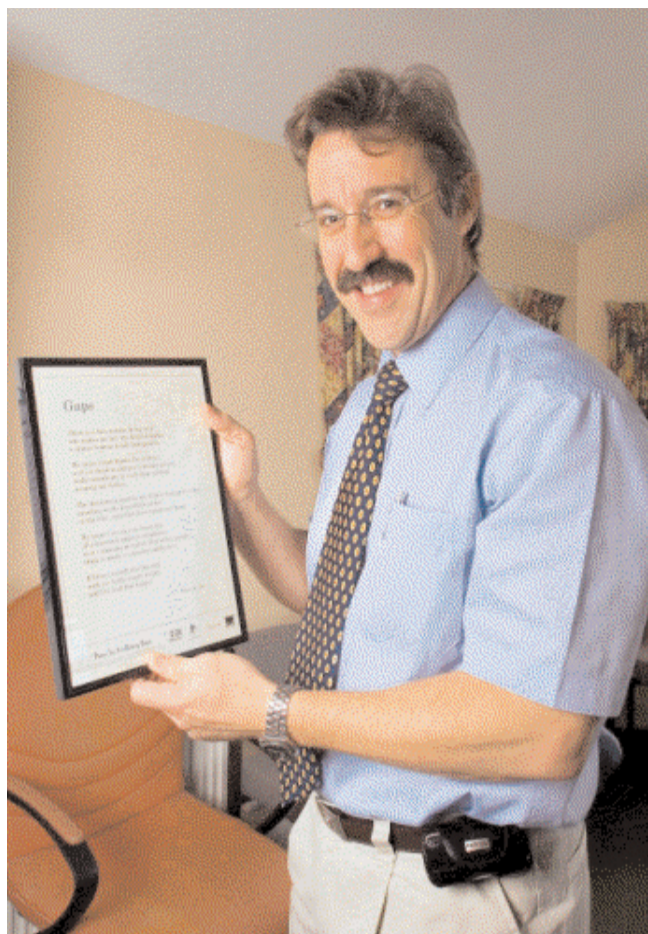
There are poems in Turkish, Kurdish, Somali, Hindi, Farsi, Urdu and in the languages of the new EU member countries.

'I've seen the response of a Palestinian man who works for Westminster PCT to the Palestinian poem,' says Wolf.

'He came to the UK as an asylum seeker and he told me that to have his own language facing him on the wall had a powerful effect on him.

'It shows respect and acknowledgement. It tells people that their experience is understood.'

Since it began in 1998, the project has distributed over 2,000 packs of poems to hospitals, health and similar settings.



Dr Paul Staten believes poems on the wall can be uplifting

It is run by a charity called Hyphen-21 and its main source of funds has been the Arts Council of England.

The poems can be displayed on the walls and rotated every month or so, or it is possible to project them on to the waiting room wall.

In Milton Keynes, 85 per

cent of GP surgeries now have the poems in their waiting rooms thanks to an organisation called Milton Keynes Arts for Health.

An artist funded to promote the poetry project regularly visits GP surgeries to encourage them to display poems and to talk to staff and patients

about the poetry. She has also run some interactive sessions with patients in mental health daycare centres and has encouraged them to write poems of their own.

'It has been a success story and we are delighted with the results,' said Susan Brown, chairwoman of Milton Keynes Arts for Health.

## Writings on the wall

Dr Paul Staten of Red House Surgery in Bletchley, Milton Keynes, said: 'It is uplifting to have the poems on the wall. It makes people reflect on their condition.'

'We don't get much feedback from the patients, but the feedback we have had has been positive.'

'We held a creative writing workshop for all the practice staff to introduce the poetry project. This was a protected time initiative and proved very stimulating.'

At West Gorton Medical Centre in Manchester, the poems are displayed in folders for patients to leaf through in the waiting room.

Practice manager Julie Jefferson said: 'I think they are brilliant. We have a multi-ethnic population here and it is excellent that there is something for the patients to read in their own language.'

## Poems for your waiting room

- For a full set of Poems for the Waiting Room, send a padded envelope (larger than A4), stamped to the value of £6.28 to: Rogan Wolf, Hyphen-21, Bishop Creighton House, 378 Lillie Road, London SW6 7PH.
- For the diversity collection only, stamp the envelope to the value of £2.71.
- If you are interested in poems on bereavement contact Rogan Wolf on r.wolf@hyphen-21.org.uk.
- Full details at www.hyphen-21.org.

**References:** 1. Data on file TOC 01, Astellas Pharma Ltd. 2. Data on file TOC 02, Astellas Pharma Ltd. 3. Data on file TOC 03, Astellas Pharma Ltd. 4. Data on file TOC 09, Astellas Pharma Ltd. 5. Data on file TOC 04, Astellas Pharma Ltd. 6. Data on file TOC 05, Astellas Pharma Ltd. 7. Data on file TOC 06, Astellas Pharma Ltd. 8. Data on file TOC 07, Astellas Pharma Ltd.

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