

Vital Directions From the National Academy of Medicine

Opinion

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During the past decade, health care in the United States has been characterized by advances in medical science and care delivery, new forms of financing, and growing attention to wellness and prevention. However, alongside these advances are ongoing challenges of rising costs, disparities in health status and access, and health care quality that may fail to equal the quality of care in other high-income nations. To address these challenges and in anticipation of a new presidential administration, the National Academy of Medicine launched a policy initiative, Vital Directions for Health & Health Care. A steering committee identified 19 priority focus areas that reflect 3 overarching themes to guide US health care reform: better health and well-being, high-value health care, and strong science and technology. Working groups comprising more than 100 leading scientists, researchers, and policy makers compiled information and contributed expert opinion to inform debate and decisions regarding these 19 health care priorities.

This issue of *JAMA* features 19 Viewpoint articles summarizing findings and recommendations of the respective Vital Directions working groups. Two Editorials reflect on the issues considered by the Vital Directions initiative and consider possibilities and challenges for health care reform in the United States.

Clinical Review & Education

Primary Care Interventions to Support Breastfeeding 1688

This US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommendation statement addresses primary care interventions in the prenatal and postpartum periods—including those provided by health care professionals and nonprofessional peer educators—to support breastfeeding. Based on a review of the evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions to promote breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusivity, the USPSTF recommends providing interventions during pregnancy and after birth to support breastfeeding. In an Editorial, Flaherman and Von Kohorn discuss benefits and potential harms of interventions to support breastfeeding.

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Art in My Veins

A Medical Self-portrait

Carrie A. Butt

A typical self-portrait documents the artist's appearance. It may be self-serving, showing the subject's more laudable attributes, or it may be more revealing of the sitter's inner life. Artist Philip Carey has created a different kind of self-portrait, using disease as a catalyst to portray a universal feeling about the burden of being sick. His medical self-portrait, *Art in My Veins*, is a record of processes imposed on his body, a catalog of evidence that reflects excessive interventions required to heal.

Born in 1942 in Long Beach, California, Carey had always been a collector, picking up bits and pieces from his environment and saving them for potential projects. "I've always looked at my environment & situations from an artistic viewpoint—interested in the ephemera of our civilization—stuff that's used then thrown out—refuse—& its artistic possibilities," he explained in written correspondence. When in 2004 a broken arm brought him into a hospital environment, he found a whole new world of materials that could be mined for art. Beginning with his cast and steel pins, he started a new collection of medically related scraps. Unfortunately, the collection grew quickly, as he was diagnosed with heart disease the same year, kidney disease in 2008, and prostate cancer in 2011. Renal failure, with its endless hours of hemodialysis, produced seemingly endless administrative and medical detritus, including medicine bottles, syringes, hospital gloves, dietary literature, prescriptions, billing notices, and dialysis machine hardware. Carey eventually accumulated a medical collection culled from an estimated 15 hospital operations, 12 outpatient procedures, 37 radiation treatments, and about 3000 hours of dialysis. By 2015 he felt he had enough material to produce a sculpture, and the result was his life-sized vignette, *Art in My Veins*.

In *Art in My Veins* Carey places himself in the center of a small stage, posed as a silent carnival barker with a marquee displaying the piece's title hung above him. His face is contorted into a painful grimace as he pulls apart his chest cavity to reveal major organs sculpted from chicken wire, clay, plaster, and paint. The organs are hooked up to real catheters and a dialysis machine. The remainder of his body and stage are plastered with his collected medical materials, densely accompanied by colored drawings on envelopes of scenes or objects Carey viewed while confined to his chair, photographs of procedural scars and bruises, echocardiograms and x-ray films, and photographs of the artist undergoing tests and procedures. The whole scene creates a baroque chaos around the central figure. Its composition telescopes years of chronic illness interventions into a single frame of space and time and keeps the eye in motion while it simultaneously compels it to pause and examine the more discreet minutiae that make up



the larger effect. In this way the viewer's experience of the work could be said to reflect the health and care of people like Carey, whose office or clinic visits often require physicians and patients to shift focus within extensive problem, test result, and medication lists while also keeping a larger picture of the patient in mind. By painstakingly arranging the physical elements of his health care experience, Carey emulates the burdens of chronic disease with its constant calculations of new medicines and treatments, the stressful accumulation of medical bills, and the vigilance needed to keep track of it all.

Carey reports that few health care workers took notice of his work while it was in process. During his 6 years of dialysis treatments, he completed about 450 drawings on No. 10 envelopes, but physicians and nurses rarely commented on them. He muses, "... perhaps it was a HIPAA/personal space situation." One exception was a tattooed physician who jokingly asked Carey to design a tattoo for him. Carey received a more active response to the work from other hemodialysis patients when a print of *Art in My Veins* was displayed in the lobby of DaVita San Luis Obispo dialysis center where he had received his treatments. They felt the work aptly demonstrated the complexity of living with renal replacement therapy and the toll on lifestyle that dialysis has for both patients and their families.

Rebecca Hoffberger, founder and director of the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, knew Carey as an artist and museum visitor. He would periodically send her his elaborately drawn envelopes, so she was familiar with his concentration on medical themes. Focusing on how the sculpture could inspire a hope for healing in its viewers and thinking the work could particularly bring awareness to the acute need for willing organ donors, she included *Art in My Veins* in the museum's exhibition, *The Big Hope Show* (October 3, 2015–September 4, 2016), an exhibition curated to "champion the



Philip Carey (1942-), *Art in My Veins*, 2015, American. Mixed media.

radiant and transformative power of hope." Carey received a successful kidney transplant in 2015.

Despite his many ailments, Carey's outlook is undeniably upbeat: "Since I tend to look at my life as one big art happening, all the aspects of my surgical preparation for dialysis and the treatments that followed for 6 years and the recent kidney transplant experience have felt like they were all part of an art piece. ... I'm back to leading a typically hectic life while adjusting to being 73, thinking like 23, and trying to live with the new normal."

Carey's latest completed project moves on from medical themes but still depends on materials collected over time. He plans to exhibit a sculpted scene of the Andean rainforest,

where cacao trees grow, completely from chocolate wrappers saved over 33 years. Apparently, there is more than art running through Philip Carey's veins.

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Section Editor: Roxanne K. Young, Associate Senior Editor.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: The author has completed and submitted the ICMJE Form for the Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest and none were reported.

Submissions: The Arts and Medicine editors welcome proposals for features in the section. Submit yours at artsandmedicine@jamanetwork.com.

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