

WesternU Hosts Inaugural A.P. Howells DO Endowed Lectureship Promoting Patient-Centered Care Through Narrative Medicine

WesternU COMP-Northwest's inaugural A.P. Howells, DO, Lectureship highlighted narrative medicine's role in fostering empathy and patient-centered care.



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-- Western University of Health
Sciences' College of Osteopathic

Medicine of the Pacific-Northwest (COMP-Northwest), which is in the process of transitioning to its new name, the Heatherington College of Osteopathic Medicine, held the inaugural A.P. Howells, DO, Endowed Lectureship on Saturday, August 16, 2025. The event featured Nalini Velayudhan, DO, and Brian Loveless, DO '02, who led an engaging program emphasizing the role of narrative medicine in advancing patient-centered care.

The lectureship convened medical students, faculty, and healthcare professionals to explore how storytelling and active listening enhance clinical relationships and improve care outcomes. Through a combination of lecture and hands-on training, the program highlighted the essential human dimensions of medicine, empathy, understanding, and trust.

Exploring the Foundations of Narrative Medicine

Narrative medicine, a discipline that uses storytelling to deepen understanding between patients and providers, served as the central theme of the event. Dr. Velayudhan opened the program with a workshop examining the method's foundational principles and its practical applications in clinical settings.

She explained that narrative medicine is built on three core pillars: attention, representation, and affiliation. Attention involves a provider's capacity to listen deeply and attentively to a patient's story. Representation encompasses how clinicians interpret and record those narratives. These two practices ultimately support affiliation, the mutual trust and partnership that define effective, patient-centered care.

According to Dr. Velayudhan, this framework encourages practitioners to engage with patients as whole individuals rather than as cases or conditions, helping bridge the gap between diagnosis and human experience.

Integrating Narrative and Osteopathic Practice

Following Dr. Velayudhan's presentation, Dr. Loveless demonstrated how narrative medicine aligns with the principles of osteopathic manipulative medicine (OMM). He emphasized that touch, observation, and empathy serve as forms of communication between physician and patient, reinforcing the values of presence and compassion in care delivery.

Dr. Loveless described attention as being present through palpation and attunement to breath, tone, and subtle physical cues. Representation, in this context, extends beyond identifying structural issues to understanding how somatic dysfunction reflects a patient's lived experience. Ultimately, affiliation develops through trust and connection fostered by therapeutic touch.

During the workshop, Dr. Loveless shared a personal encounter that exemplified the emotional and relational power of physical presence in medicine:

"A patient that I saw during COVID in an urgent care setting came in. She had recently been hospitalized for a week for COVID, and she was still feeling short of breath, so she came to urgent care to get checked out. I listened to her story and then I went over to do an examination, and I put a hand on her shoulder as I auscultated the lungs, as I always do, and she reached up and touched my hand," said Dr. Loveless. "We finished the exam, I sat back down, and she said, 'I'm sorry. I probably shouldn't have done that.' I said, 'No, it's absolutely fine,' and she responded, 'You know, I spent a week in the hospital and nobody touched me.' Just that simple act, and she was already breathing better. I think she just needed somebody to see her. Physical touch can be so additive to what we do."

His remarks underscored the event's overarching theme: that authentic human connection remains an indispensable part of healing.

Honoring the Legacy of A.P. Howells, DO

The endowed lectureship was established in honor of A.P. Howells, DO, whose pioneering work and commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care continue to inspire the osteopathic community. The lectureship was made possible through the generosity of his daughter, Jocelyn Howells.

Dr. Howells earned his medical degree from the A.T. Still College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1911 and later established his practice in Albany, Oregon. Throughout his career, he exemplified the osteopathic philosophy of treating the whole person, body, mind, and spirit, and maintained a lifelong dedication to improving the well-being of his patients.

"My father was an exceptional human being. He was very intelligent, and he was very wise," Jocelyn Howells said. "And he also memorized thousands of jokes. He had a joke for every patient. The first thing he did when he got into a consultation room with a patient was tell a joke to them. I worked for my father from when I was 12 to 18 during the summers and on weekends, and I could hear the patients laughing. That's how I learned he was memorizing these jokes."

Dr. Howells' practice reflected a deeply human approach to medicine. He frequently collaborated with his sister, Dr. Mary Howells, a psychiatrist and fellow osteopathic physician, to address the emotional and psychological aspects of patient care alongside physical treatment.

Continuing a Tradition of Empathy and Excellence

Through the A.P. Howells, DO, Endowed Lectureship, WesternU COMP-Northwest reaffirms its commitment to cultivating physicians who approach medicine with compassion, attentiveness, and respect for the whole patient.

By integrating the principles of narrative medicine with osteopathic philosophy, the college aims to equip future clinicians with the skills to listen deeply, connect meaningfully, and provide care that honors each patient's story.

About Western University of Health Sciences

Western University of Health Sciences (www.westernu.edu), located in Lebanon, Oregon, and Pomona, Calif., is an independent nonprofit health professions university, conferring degrees in osteopathic medicine, physical therapy, biotechnology and pharmaceutical sciences, dental medicine, medical sciences, nursing, optometry, pharmacy, physician assistant studies, podiatric medicine, and veterinary medicine. WesternU is home to [WesternU Health](#), where the best in collaborative health care services is offered.

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