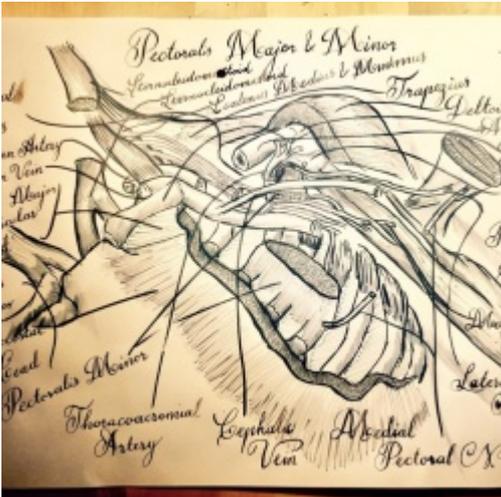


5 Fun Ways to Impact Medicine (Without Medical School)



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — April 19, 2017



Credit: Dr. Raf Ratinam [1]

Inspired by the extraordinary artistry of medical illustrator and aspiring surgeon, [Dr. Raf Ratinam](#) [1], in my piece [From Anatomy to 3D Printing: Art Inspires Life](#) [2], I decided to expand the discussion. Yes, his animations and mastery of anatomy acquired through graduate level medical training and now a PhD pursuit permits endless possibilities for his future career path.

But, it also begs the question: Are there roles for others so creatively or empathetically inclined to contribute to the field of medicine without partaking in the arduous and formal, traditional medical school track? An emphatic yes would be my response.

We tend to put ourselves in boxes if the world doesn't do it first. The incredible thing about life is the ability to change your course constantly and recognize many goals are achievable through alternate ways. Life is about growth, there is no better way to attain this than to step outside of your comfort zone. Try something new.

It is rare people regret what they did. Often, what they didn't do carries greater weight. Or burden.

There are many ways to impact others without having to follow one road. For those with an artistic side, a lifetime achievement of an Atlas of Anatomy can be [Dr. Ratinam](#) [1]'s goal but doesn't have to be yours. You can dabble. You can make a professional life. Or a part-time one. You can do, then not do, then do again. There are no rules to this journey.

Hopefully, we challenge ourselves in avenues that allow us to make environments we enter even better than they were after we have left. So, let's delve deeper into some opportunities that abound should you want to interact with patients or the healthcare sphere without having to become a

physician.

Here are 5 Ways to Impact Medicine (without medical school):

1) Medical Illustrator/Art Health

There are countless ways you can employ your creative talents in the art health fields without having to acquire such high level training as [Dr. Ratinam](#) [1]. Recognizing that that level provides him limitless potential in simulation development, computer animation, 3D printing and surgical illustration to name a few, there are other arenas that the rest of us can endeavor to pursue. These alternative modes of training still allow us to help others and benefit science and health communication.

Art therapy is a very important component to easing stress of chronic disease. Cancer centers often have programs as do many treatment, rehabilitative, long-term skilled nursing, outpatient or hospital-based facilities. So, maybe volunteering is your path to getting involved.

For those interested in more technical work as a medical illustrator, the [Association of Medical Illustrators](#) [3] is an excellent resource. The organization's motto being "Illuminating the Science of Life." They detail what your emphasis should be from high school on if considering a career in the field (click [here](#) [4]). As the discipline is continually evolving, they list the following as only the beginning of paths one can take with acquiring such skills: trade and consumer publications, textbooks, journals, eBooks, Web, courtroom exhibits, patient education, continuing medical education (CME), interactive learning, advertising, mobile health apps, health games, trade shows, museums, veterinary and dental markets, television, film, augmented and virtual reality simulators. To learn more about employment outlook, click [here](#) [5].

2) Standardized Patients and Patient Instructors

A lot has changed from the time of television's iconic show *Seinfeld* when Kramer gave the role of "standardized patient" his all. For a bit of nostalgia and guaranteed laughter, check out his portrayals [here](#) [6] and [here](#) [7]. To learn more of his "condition" without the use of artistic license, review these articles [Gonorrhea and Chlamydia and Syphilis, Oh My!](#) [8], and [Gargling with Listerine Impedes Oral Gonorrhea?](#) [9]

So much has evolved in this arena, even since I was in medical school. When I attended, we only utilized standardized patients for gynecologic examinations. As you can imagine, this is quite an invaluable opportunity for medical students or doctors in training so they don't have to perform these more invasive procedures for the first time on a more vulnerable patient. Those who do this generous work—which is certainly not for everyone—genuinely help that physician's future patients and advance the field.

Now, there are many types of standardized patients. Most do a Kramer-like representation without the dramatic performance component and don't subject themselves to any invasive procedures. Only those interested in volunteering for more extensive or significant procedures do so.

There is a false perception participation is only suitable to actors. This is not the case at all. This is

a great part-time opportunity for someone with flexibility who wants to make a difference in medical education. It also helps the medical students learn to be professional and how to interact respectfully with patients. Retirees are a notable choice. Especially retired or inactive physicians or health care workers who could pay forward their knowledge and wisdom, remain current and possibly be inspired as work through their respective transition.

For example, at [Temple University's Lewis Katz School of Medicine](#) [10], they also train the lay person to be a PI (patient instructor): "A PI is a lay person who has been trained to teach basic motor skill aspects of a physical examination using their own bodies as the teaching material. They instruct students how to make use of some simple physical examination equipment such as tuning forks, blood pressure cuffs, ophthalmoscopes, etc. They then teach students basic physical examination skills such as auscultating the heart and lungs, palpating the abdomen, eliciting reflexes, etc."

There is variability in simulation centers depending on the institution. To learn more, check out the standardized patient programs at your nearest medical school (usually included on their respective websites).

3) Medical Translation

Hospitals, health systems and practitioners— in general—often require medical translation for patients and public health materials etc... This work also comes with great variability depending upon the location and scope of facility. But, if your interest is interacting with patients without having to become a licensed health care professional, then it could be a meaningful way to contribute to the patient experience. It is very frightening to be sick, even more so when you can't understand the language your care takers are speaking; therefore, the value you can provide is priceless.

So, if you speak multiple languages and want to maintain your skills while genuinely helping others, then this could be a perfect chance for you to make a profound difference in another person's life. Additionally, your skills can be professionally implemented throughout the realms of science and health communication from medical education to the pharmaceutical industry.

The scope and depth of involvement is up to your level of interest. To learn more about becoming a certified medical interpreter, review this [link](#) [11].

4) Child Life Specialist

Child Life health professionals are an incredible part of the pediatric care giving team. They work with physicians, nurses and providers along with the patient and his/her family to augment the child and loved ones' experience as well as help and support their ability to cope with the struggles of illness, disability, painful procedures and other challenges of being hospitalized.

They provide and arrange for therapeutic play meeting the individual at their level of development. As a matter of routine, they coordinate beneficial adjunctive therapy that assuages fears and eases stress (like art or music therapy) while they also actively solve problems by individualizing plans to minimize pain and discomfort for the injured or suffering patient within his/her personal restrictions. These efforts extend to families too.

To learn about [what they do](#) [12] and [obtaining certification](#) [13], click the previous blue links.

5) Volunteering from Pet Therapy to Holding Babies

If a formal job is not your desire, then consider volunteering. The diversity of opportunity to do so is quite extensive. Pet therapy, for instance, is a proven benefit to stress reduction, improvement of mental health and well-being as well as cardiovascular health (learn more from these articles on the health benefits of animals [Hey, Prescription Nation! Pets Now 'Main' Script For Mental Health Issues](#) [14], [Big Supreme Court Win For Girl And Her Service Dog](#) [15]). Though this work is only for those pets that have no aggression and would do well in such busy, hectic environments.

Hospitals have departments dedicated to this type of activity. With pet therapy, expect veterinarian clearance and if in a hospital, especially, yours and your pet's vaccine records and health clearance come into play. There are foundations that also certify pet therapy and arrange visits from nursing homes to the district attorney's office for victims of violent crime if your interest is to enter other facilities.

From military veteran health services, community programs to major health centers, the chances to volunteer abound depending on your particular focus. Whatever your focus is, there is a place right for you. Some newborn nurseries need volunteers to hold babies, for example.

In Summary... All you have to do is pick something, get started and try it! You will be amazed at not only how much your help is needed and appreciated, but also by how much the experience impacts you more than you might ever have imagined. There are so many ways to take part, this list is a mere beginning.

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Links

[1] <https://twitter.com/RafRatinam>

[2] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2017/04/18/anatomy-3d-printing-art-inspires-life-11147>

[3] <http://www.ami.org>

[4] <http://www.ami.org/medical-illustration/enter-the-profession/education>

[5] <http://www.ami.org/medical-illustration/enter-the-profession/careers>

[6] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUPZDNjAO8Y>

[7] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLRlBsBJhio>

[8] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2016/10/28/gonorrhea-and-chlamydia-and-syphilis-oh-my-10344>

[9] <http://acsh.org/news/2016/12/22/gargling-listerine-impedes-oral-gonorrhea-10630>

[10] <https://medicine.temple.edu/education/institute-clinical-simulation-and-patient-safety/programs/standardized-patients>

[11] <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org>

[12] <https://www.childlife.org>

[13] <https://www.childlife.org/certification>

[14] <http://acsh.org/news/2016/12/12/hey-prescription-nation-pets-now-main-script-mental-health-issues-10565>

[15] <http://acsh.org/news/2017/02/26/big-supreme-court-win-girl-and-her-service-dog-10907>