

Editorial: Systemic practitioners living with illness and health conditions

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Volume 6

Issue 1

Spring 2023

The theme for this important special edition has been in our thoughts for some time. We 'knew' (from previous contributions to the journal and our own experiences) that there were stories that needed to be told, written, shared and witnessed in relation to therapists' health and how this intersects with practice- the tensions, dilemmas and ethical considerations that require careful and thorough negotiation. All this at times when we are least likely to be feeling at our most robust and energised. Whilst we had a strong "hunch" that there were stories to be heard that would speak to this, we were perhaps surprised how many important, perhaps urgent, stories needed to be told.

Citation Link

These are daring, first-person stories from professional practitioners, written from within and about our most "human" moments, when we traverse unknown and scary personal paths with health conditions in tow. These stories map, in rich detail, important ethical choices and challenges about how we view ourselves and make sense of our professional identities, our roles as therapists and our relationships with illness, pain and loss that, at times, cannot be ignored.

The anthology in prose and poetry shares many themes as well as voicing different and unequal experiences. The old adage that the "personal is always political" is highly evident throughout the collection.

The first paper by Marilena Karamatsouki offers an insight into the questions we might ask ourselves as therapists when health status and treatments are impacting our practices. Marilena poignantly shares her "in the moment" and "after the fact" reflections arising from sharing her cancer diagnosis with people she works/worked with, laying out the ethical tensions with dignity and care.

The second paper featured in this special issue draws connections to the first one. Through her stories from personal and professional life during the time she had cancer, Gail Simon explores how "transcontextual storytelling extends what it means to be human".

In her paper, Leah Salter explores the tensions that arise from perceived failure. She reflects on how, as professionals, we can honour the tensions that come along with difficult times and speaks to the ethical tension of “how to hold onto the multiple, ever evolving definitions of self that can be obscured or even obliterated by consuming experiences of ill health”.

Smaro Markou writes deep from within her experience of suffering from the side effects of covid-19. Reflecting on her “Journey into the Abyss” she explores the changes in her sense of identity and her professional role that followed her experience. Connecting with the voices of people who have nourished her practice she offers reflections on identity, power and on being a therapist.

In her short paper, Judy McCarthy writes about her relationship with pain, the changes this relationship has undergone with time, and the relational approach she uses, in order to live life to the fullest with Pain as a companion.

Cathy Richardson/Kinewesquao, writing from within practice as a Métis therapist and educator challenges the trend to pathologise psychotherapist’s experiences, reminding us of the healing powers of dignity and collective “communities of care”, even if “geographically disparate or far flung”.

Peace Anumah illuminates the racialisation and racial bias embedded in the *care* of people suffering with Sickle Cell Disease. We learn about one therapist's (therapist warrior's) experience through an in-depth inquiry that follows a conversation between the author and therapist warrior, highlighting multiple personal and political contexts.

In the last full paper featured in this issue, Julia Evans and Leah Salter speak about their experiences of ill health via a duoethnographic poetic inquiry. Julia and Leah collaborate in writing poetry to and with each other, creating a dialogue between stories of practitioners facing illness and inviting new meaning to emerge.

The poetic inquiry of this paper gracefully gives way to three featured poems. Billy Hardy’s moving poem was inspired by an important gathering with his siblings following his recent diagnosis of cancer; a meeting with respect, openness, attentiveness and love where important “first-time” conversations took place. Billy reminds us that although our lives are fleeting, they are complex and interconnected with others, with transformative and empowering effect. In her poem, Shelby Hopland Guidi invokes reflection on how we adapt to new ways of being, including aspects of ill health. The structure of the poetry holding the tensions expressed by the writer and inviting us, as readers, to reflect on our own stories of adaptation. In the last poem featured in this issue, Joanne Hipplewith offers a living assemblage of words, rhythms, sounds, feelings and thoughts, sharing a “withness” account of how we all face inner turmoils at times. In a powerful way, the poem speaks to the damage and trauma caused by oppression, particularly within the context of colonisation.

Finally, this issue features a new section titled **Beyond Words**, where we host pieces of art work. In this issue, Liz Day presents “The grief diaries number 1”, an image and text screen-printed over one another which shows, in a visceral way, the unpredictability of grief following the painful loss of loved ones suffering from health conditions.

The theme of therapists living with illness or with a life impacting health condition that affects their practice is close to heart for us. Pain, confusion, fear and loss (all explored in this anthology of works) sadly goes with the (ever changing) territory.

Reading the contributions to the special issue, we have felt privileged that the authors have shared, with generosity and sensitivity, their personal stories to *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice*, and we thank the contributors for their courage, care and concern.

Citation

Karamatsouki, Marilena; Michopoulou, Joanna & Salter, Leah (2023). Editorial. *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice*, 6(1), i-iii. <https://doi.org/10.28963/6.1.1>