Out of Hours Photography

WHAT COUNTS RATHER THAN WHAT CAN BE COUNTED

Shoreditch Stories

Royal College of General Practitioners,
30 Euston Square, London

Ongoing, free entry by appointment

The idea for this photo exhibition arose following a discussion about one of our patients, John McDonagh. After most surgery time the GPs in my practice discuss the patients we have seen. It was during one of these sessions that Paul Kelland and I were discussing John. We were reflecting on John's earlier life experience as a bare-knuckle fighter and how vital this was in understanding the man he was.

Increasingly in medicine, through computers and incentives, we are being encouraged to focus on the measurable. This biomedical approach risks dehumanising both patients and practitioners. The art of medicine and the narrative is at risk of being lost as well as the individual and their needs. Our health and wellbeing are bound up by our lifetime experiences and this is the context in which the measurable should be placed.

Each day in general practice, we bear witness to some amazing and touching stories about people's lives. In this exhibition we wanted to celebrate this aspect of our jobs and how much we value this. We are generalists and deal with the complexity of people's lives. That is what marks us out from the other specialties and what motivated me to become a GP.

We worked with Michael von Graffenried, (www.mvgphoto.com), an award-winning photographer whose trademark is his panoramic camera. Michael has worked in Algeria, documenting the civil war. More

John McDonagh, age 63. 106 x 43 cm (42 x 17") digital colour print. © Michael von Graffenried, mvgphoto.com.

Abiola Oyesanya (age 42), Elizabeth Akintomide (age 2), David Akintomide (age 5). 106 x 43 cm (42 x 17") digital colour print. © Michael von Graffenried, mvgphoto.com.

recently he worked with a couple of drug addicts in Switzerland, gaining their trust and capturing on film how they lived their lives.

Our project, *Shoreditch Stories* involved one of the doctors accompanying Michael and visiting patients and families in their own homes. Our homes say a lot about ourselves; and without time pressure, it was lovely to just sit, observe and listen with no agenda. I heard some touching, funny, uplifting and shocking stories. I formed a

different perspective about people and some previous assumptions were challenged.

Thirty people and families were involved in the project and consented to their photos and stories being exhibited. The experience has been a real collaboration between art and medicine and we initially hosted the exhibition in our surgery. We had a private viewing with a party for all those involved to celebrate and it has been a motivating experience for everyone (see a short YouTube video of the opening: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yzSk7-C7N8>). We gave the exhibition the title *What Counts Rather Than What Can Be Counted* and we hope it will create a debate in health care about how we measure the valuable rather than simply valuing the measurable.

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To visit the exhibition please contact the College archivist Sharon Messenger: heritage@rcgp.org.uk

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Frank and Alice. 106 x 43 cm (42 x 17") digital colour print. © Michael von Graffenried, mvgphoto.com.