



# GRAPHIC MEDICINE LIAISON TO CHAPLAINS.

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At the intersection between the medium  
of comics & the discourse of healthcare.

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## W E L C O M E TO THE GRAPHIC MEDICINE COMMUNITY

*I was welcomed warmly to the 2015 Annual Conference and then to subsequent conferences. I also served on the planning committee for the 2018 Conference hosted by the Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction, Vermont. So too, I hope to serve as a collegial resource to the many opportunities to participate in this creative--and caring--movement.*

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CARTOONING CHAPLAIN  
CLINICAL CHAPLAIN & ACPE CERTIFIED EDUCATOR

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*Having led dozens of workshops for chaplains in the last decade, I share here three tips:*

1. **YOU DO NOT NEED TO DRAW.** Much as chaplains can learn to collaborate with researchers, so too can chaplains learn to *collaborate* with cartoonists and other graphic medicine folks.
  2. **THE INTERSECTIONS** of comics and healthcare are manifold and diverse. The banquet of opportunity is plentiful and ever-developing. Make it your own.
  3. **HAVE FUN.** I have needed a healthy theology of play to sustain my practice of sitting with persons in spiritual and emotional distress. I imagine you might too.
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*please feel welcome to contact me:*

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## CLINICAL CHAPLAINCY & CARTOONING: An Introduction by Kurt F. Shaffert



CARTOONING CHAPLAIN, Kurt F. Shaffert,  
& COMIC NURSE, MK Czerwiec (NYC, 2018).

AS A CLINICAL CHAPLAIN, when I walk into a patient's room what I want to do is create sacred space; a space that transcends the iv pole, the hospital gown, the beeps, the diagnosis, the blood draws. I'm trying to free up some room where something new can be experienced, told, shared; a place for feelings, story, and meaning-making. It doesn't take much: just the patient, their words, and my pad and pencil.

THE PROCESS OF CARTOONING TOGETHER WITH HOSPITAL PATIENTS facilitates reflections in ways which do not occur during a conventional chaplain/patient conversation. Within a 40 minute bedside visit, whether in hospice, a medical/surgical floor or an inpatient psychiatry unit, a patient narrates to me a 4 panel cartoon about whatever is on his or her heart. As the patient speaks, I fill in the boxes with narration, helping them to boil down the narrative to short phrases. We then return to the cartoon boxes, and I invite the patient to use stick figures to express and comment upon the narration. Examples include:

- \* AN ELDER ENGAGES IN LIFE REVIEW, describing their experiences as a child in reconstruction Berlin and how the images that they saw have influenced their life.
- \* A COMBAT VETERAN tells the story of a hypothetical character named, "Joe", and his run in with the law due to drinking and the process that he goes through to regain sobriety. After re-reading the photocopied cartoon, the Veteran states states, "This will help me remember what I have been through and the choices that I can make."
- \* A PATIENT IN AN INPATIENT PSYCHIATRY UNIT recounts their experience of psychosis and concludes, "I'm not ready to talk in person with my spouse; but what is in my head and my heart is now on paper in my hand that I can give to them."

The form of cartoons offers a playfulness that engages the patient in the clinical encounter, making it possible to talk about intimate issues with sincerity and humor. Because the process of narrating cartoon boxes both slows down the narrator, as well as boils down the wording more succinctly than in written Life Reviews--and more freely than if facilitating poetry, the "heart" of the story is quickly and directly conveyed.

While conventional art therapy is based on the patient accessing their own artistry for expressing themselves, this form of collaborative cartooning offers my skills as a cartoonist to assist the patient in putting their story into an aesthetic form. The patient has the freedom to focus on the narration as well as to see my immediate responses to dictation. The story is created through the relationship and in the space between us. As a chaplain, I honor that story as sacred. The means by which I facilitate the sharing of these stories is called, "Therapeutic Process Cartooning."



## CLINICAL CHAPLAINCY & GRAPHIC MEDICINE: Resources & How to Get Started

AS A CLINICAL CHAPLAIN, I see myself working in Graphic Medicine at three levels:

**1. The personal:** Bedside with patients, I make use of Therapeutic Process Cartooning to help a person in the moment—for the moment—like a sand mandala in which the patient is directing my cartooning for mirroring.

<https://www.upworthy.com/3-comics-created-by-military-veterans-that-help-us-understand-war>

**2. The public:** I assist and equip careseekers—and caregivers—to “express the inexpressible” through cartooning for others to read.

<https://www.necn.com/news/local/vermont/using-cartooning-to-help-veterans-heal-from-wounds-of-war/17209/>

**3. The professional:** I collaborate with clinicians, cartoonists and others to create professional-grade comics regarding advocacy issues.

<https://gumroad.com/l/alifetimeoffirsts>

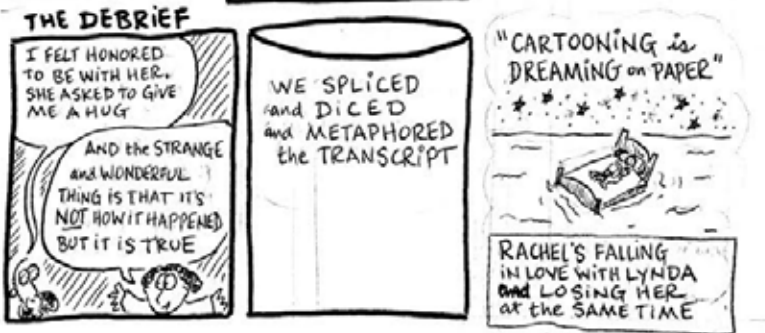
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### How to get started?

REACH OUT & COLLABORATE.

For more information:  
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A cartoon handout for the 2018 Graphic Medicine Conference regarding collaborating with an Oral Historian on writing a comic for a professionally produced anthology of comics illustrating the experiences of Veterans, “A Whole Lifetime of Firsts”.

WHILE THERE ARE NOT (YET) CLINICAL STUDIES relating directly to chaplaincy and cartooning/comics, I particularly have appreciated the scholarship—and the community—of Drama Therapists. Indeed, Therapeutic Process Cartooning is based upon the practices of Playback Theater used by Developmental Transformation (DvT) clinicians. Here are two scholars of that movement:

\* *PLAYING OFF THE BEAT: APPLYING THE JAZZ PARADIGM TO PSYCHOTHERAPY* by David Read Johnson:  
[https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=David+read+johnson&ac=yes&cauthor\\_id=None&user\\_filter=&sche-ma=all&page=1&whatsnew=None&show\\_snippets=on&format=summary&sort=relevance&sort\\_order=desc&size=10](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=David+read+johnson&ac=yes&cauthor_id=None&user_filter=&sche-ma=all&page=1&whatsnew=None&show_snippets=on&format=summary&sort=relevance&sort_order=desc&size=10)

\* *AESTHETIC PRESENCE: THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN THE EDUCATION OF CREATIVE ARTS THERAPISTS IN THE CLASSROOM AND ONLINE* by Nisha Sajnani, Christine Mayor & Heather Tillberg-Webb  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=Nisha+sajnani>