

## Doctor, Meet Your Muse

Thinking outside the clinical box was the doctor's order for the day as members of the medical residency program at Trinitas attended a workshop in April facilitated by poet Richard J. Newman, professor of English at Nassau Community College in Garden City, New York. The "Poetry Heals" workshop helped Trinitas medical residents think beyond their daily concerns of patient pain and treatment to consider how reading and writing poetry had the potential to add a richer, human dimension to their professional lives.

Joining the medical residents at the workshop were Dr. Jill Butler, Director of Primary Care in the Internal Medicine Residency Program; Debbie Durand, Clinical Specialist in Critical Care; Dr. William Farrer, Associate Director of the Internal Medicine Residency Program, and Diane Reehil, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Med Surg.

Newman asked each participant to share a personal observation or experience. As discussion unfolded, comments from the residents emerged about how the difficult and demanding aspects of medicine often resulted in walls they created between themselves and their patients to safeguard their emotional wellbeing. By understanding universal themes of the human experience found in poetry, Newman suggested they could connect more compassionately with patients. After he shared poems written by a medical intern, several of the residents felt they could identify with the poet's work. Newman read his own poem, "Surrender," which recounted his shifting emotional reaction to a doctor's explanation of a serious medical condition affecting his son. Hearing that poem prompted the residents to consider how they deliver information to patients and their families.

Newman believed that the medical residents could enrich their professional lives through creative expression. He urged them "to open up to creativity, to consider keeping a journal to reflect on how you feel to help you to connect to what makes you who you are, to help you get inside your own skin."



*Richard J. Newman helped medical residents gain new insights through poetic expression.*

Arranged by Dr. Jill Butler, the "Poetry Heals" workshop was a partnership between the NJ Council for the Humanities, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing enriching community programming, and CavanKerry Press, a not-for-profit literary press based in Fort Lee, New Jersey. During National Poetry Month in April, these free poet-led workshops for healthcare providers were held at eight New Jersey hospitals. Now in its second year, the "Poetry Heals" program gives doctors, nurses and other medical staff the opportunity to pause and think about their encounters with patients, which helps to relieve their stress and thereby boosts healthcare quality.



*Above: Following the workshop, a few of the residents continued the discussion with the workshop presenter.*

