

Artist Turned Health Advocate: An Interview with Regina Holliday

David Sheon | September 25, 2014

Artist Regina Holliday uses her talent to change the way health care professionals see and experience their patients. Her innovative approach to draw attention to the needs of patients to be treated as individuals has already impressed thousands of health care practitioners.



When her husband suddenly became sick in early 2009, she saw the flaws in the health care system first-hand. Now, she uses unique art to advocate for patients and push for changes in health care. Holliday, joined now with other artists she's inspired, paints patient stories on the backs of blazers and lab coats, so that they can be worn to medical summits and conferences. When doctors, policy makers, and hospital administrators see these jackets, they are reminded to put patients first and view each for their own unique health history.

David Sheon

Through her ambitious initiative, "The Walking Gallery," Holliday and other artists have painted over 300 jackets, each worn by a proud patient, family member, or friend.

Patient advocacy needs fresh ideas, and we admire what Holliday is trying to do, so we interviewed her recently.



The Walking Gallery at the 2011 Health Innovation Summit at The Kaiser Permanente Center for Total Health

(Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/taedc/5824507774/in/photostream/>)



“Don’t tell me to zip it” - By Regina Holliday

(Source: <http://reginaholliday.blogspot.com/2012/06/walking-gallery-walks-on-year-two.html>)

RWHC: How did you become interested in health care issues?

Holliday: I became involved in health care after my husband, Fred Holliday, was hospitalized in 2009 and we saw how dysfunctional things could be. He was admitted to five facilities in 11 weeks. He died in home hospice during the 12th week. We had trouble accessing his medical record and I became an advocate for patient data access.

What issues particularly interest you right now?

I study patient data access, the intersection of art and health, hospital hygiene and national autopsy rates to name a few areas of interest.

If you weren’t a patient advocate, what would you be doing?

I would probably still be selling toys at my old toy store and teaching pre-k art.

What are you most proud of achieving throughout your time as a patient advocate?

I testified in 2010 to make sure that patient data access was included in Meaningful Use as a core measure. It was.

[Meaningful Use is a government regulation that provides incentives to providers to show that electronic health records are being used in meaningful ways by reaching certain thresholds. The first threshold includes capturing all patient's electronic health records in a standard format. The second threshold focuses on increasing the access of medical records to other health professionals, including hospitals, pharmacies, and labs. The final threshold focuses on improving overall public health with better quality assurance, safety, and efficiency of health care by using these health record databases.]

What is the greatest lesson that you have learned along the way?

Never give up. Perseverance wins in the end.

What is the most important thing that you want our readers to take away from this?

You can do great things even if you are one person.

How can our readers get involved?

I highly recommend using Twitter if you are focused on a cause in health care. Tweets can help you crowd source and crowd fund. You will make many friends while helping patients.

How did the idea for The Walking Gallery come about?

The Walking Gallery exists because Jen McCabe followed me on Twitter on May 30th 2009. That was the day before I placed the *Medical Facts Mural* in Pumpernickels Deli on Connecticut Ave. That was a day when my Fred was still alive and could speak and eat again because of the wonderful care he was receiving in Washington Home Hospice. On August 20th, she emailed me after I had posted a comment on her blog and asked me if I would paint a series of paintings on the back of her blazers to wear to upcoming health meetings. I told her I would be honored to paint jackets for her. The art jacket were the first part of the origin of The Walking Gallery.

In April of 2011, I went to an event with Ted Eytan, MD at the new Kaiser Permanente Center for Total Health. I told him the space was so beautiful that we should do a gallery show there. He said that they would never let us nail into the smart walls to place canvas work.

I told him the art would not be on the walls. We would wear the art and each be a docent of our own lives.

Looking for a great charity to help patients across America to donate to this Fall?
Consider [The HealthWell Foundation](#), a safety net for underinsured patients that provides access to life-changing medical treatments they otherwise would not be able to afford. To learn more and donate to patients in need, [click here!](#)

What is your favorite thing about The Walking Gallery?

Every one has a patient story and all are welcome.

Do you have a favorite jacket?

No. I love each for its unique story.

We noticed in your video that other artists are encouraged to paint these medical stories for The Walking Gallery, what can we do to help to inform other artists to join in this effort?

It is my hope that people will watch [\[this video\]](#) and paint the stories of patients far and wide.

What are you hoping The Walking Gallery will change?

I hope that when members of The Walking Gallery meet people they talk [about] the most important moment in their life and then that reframes their entire conversation on health care.

How can our readers have their health story painted on a Walking Gallery jacket?

Reach out to me. I get them done eventually. Otherwise, if you know an artist explain the concept and you can join together.

What's next? Where do you see this going?

Next summer, I am planning a conference that will be a kind of Burning Man meets health care. That will be June 4-6, 2015 [in] Grantsville, MD #Cinderblocks is our hashtag.

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