

Arts and Medicine Mix for Texas Charity

Last November, in a string of tony boutiques in Houston, 28 physicians covering the spectrum of medical specialties gathered to show off their artistic chops and raise money for a good cause. One doctor was at the piano and another had painted the pictures hanging in frames on the walls. Yet another helped make the tequila the guests were sipping.

"We had everything from head to toe—neurologists to orthopedic surgeons," said Lori Rajiman, co-founder of The Arts of Healing, a group that encourages physicians to use their creative talents to help others.

Lori and her husband Isaac Rajiman, MD, a gastroenterologist and therapeutic endoscopist, recruited physicians with talents spanning ballroom dancing to '80s rock. They weren't that hard to find, she noted. "They were all excited to show off that side of them."



Isaac Rajiman, MD
Photo credit: Composure Studios

A portion of the sales at the boutiques went to the nonprofit, which is donating the funds to pancreatic cancer research. With minimal advertising on social media and in a local newspaper, 2,000 people attended the first event, generating some \$100,000 for the cause.

The fledgling nonprofit is the culmination of talents from its participating physicians, and of its founders. Lori had used art and music in her classroom as a teacher for students with learning disabilities. By recounting what their own artwork meant to them, her students could begin to write and tell their own stories, growing academically. The same process seemed to happen when she put on shows for her husband's artwork. She saw guests express themselves while chatting and perusing her husband's paintings. This seed—the idea that art could be a form for healing and growth—would snowball into the nonprofit.



Left to right: Isaac Rajiman, MD; Fernando Urrutia, MD, with his craft tequila; Charles Phan, MD
Photo credit: Composure Studios

For Dr. Rajiman, practicing medicine and pursuing art have coexisted. Art came naturally. As a young boy growing up in an émigré Russian Jewish family in Mexico, he earned praise for his drawing ability. He copied what he saw in his surroundings onto paper. "I was inspired by things I was looking at and watching without really knowing it," he said.

Without formal training, he began painting at 16 years old, and continued on and off while completing his medical studies in Mexico, the United States and Canada. He sold paintings by word of mouth, until Lori began setting up shows of his work in 2008.

Dr. Rajiman said art provides his life equilibrium. "Having a balanced left and right brain helps with my work and my patients," he said. "It's sensitivity; you don't have to be so rigid."



Joe Galati MD
Photo credit: Composure Studios

A Larger Trend

The Arts of Healing event is one facet of a larger trend over the past decade in medicine of emphasizing creativity. Exposure to the arts has been shown to enhance patients' hospital stays and provide alternative therapies for recovery, while physicians use such outlets to relieve stress.

It's the reason Carl Dahlberg, MD, an ICU pulmonologist at Houston Methodist Hospital, got back into playing the piano publicly through this event. Dr. Dahlberg played professionally as a studio musician to help pay for medical school, but he had not performed for an audience for 35 years. He had used the piano to quiet his mind after particularly stressful days, but with his hectic schedule, he didn't find the push he needed until Lori cold-called him. When she told him the proceeds would be donated to research pancreatic cancer, which afflicted his brother, and with a little cajoling, he accepted. It was the best thing for him, he said. "I don't want to be melodramatic, but it's opening up part of my soul that I thought had died."

The Rajmans want to continue that success, helping to weave art with medicine to benefit physicians, patients and the public alike. With The Arts of Healing just over six months old, they want to continue in the same vein and grow as a nonprofit, Dr. Rajman said. The group's new goal is to raise \$200,000 in 2018. "It's been so fun and so energizing," Lori said. "It's unleashing something very positive."

More events are in the works for next year, and the duo aspires to donate the proceeds from those events to different causes. They dream of one day providing a scholarship for a needy medical student with left-brain talents, or helping to fund a research project related to gastroenterology. Sometimes, "you say a scenario is win-lose," Dr. Rajman said. "This one would all absolutes be a win-win-win."

—Meaghan Lee Callaghan