

NARRATIVE PRESCRIPTION

A Practical Storytelling Guide
for Health Care Professionals
Taking Climate Action





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Grounded in gratitude

As we recognize where our stories begin, we ground this guide in gratitude.

We recognize the interconnections between our own health and the health of our planet, and our personal connections to the places where we work and play. We are grateful for the lands, waterways and forests that surround the areas where we live and where our stories take shape.

We believe that storytelling can drive action on health, resilience, and climate change. And we've created this guide, with generous support from [DocSociety](#), to help you see yourself as part of the larger ecosystem, to use the tools to bring out the stories that you carry, and also to reflect on the stories of those around you.

We hope that by weaving together impactful stories of individuals and

diverse communities working in health care, light will be shed on the initiatives helping patients, improving systems, and contributing to community resilience.

Perhaps you have a story to share about anesthetics, or about waste, or an impactful story of community resilience. You might have several stories to tell. Each story you share connects to the larger story of our health care systems worldwide and the initiatives being made to clean our institutions for future generations.

It is our sincere desire that our work will contribute to continued healing, that it will give space for narratives that need to be heard, and that it will contribute to strong initiatives for climate justice. We invite you to join us in prescribing your story today to the audiences who need to hear it.



WHY

"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."

—Chief Seattle



Why every health care organization needs storytellers

Speaking up for climate justice

We make up a diverse workplace as passionate individuals working for the health of our communities. We imagine healthy people living in equitable and resilient communities on a thriving planet. As health care workers, both on the front lines and behind the scenes, we each play a part of a bigger story.

From detoxing the operating rooms to providing nourishing meals in the cafeteria, or to the energy managers keeping our hospitals and sites running around the clock, each physician, nurse, chef, receptionist, and custodian has a unique perspective to share. Whether you are in an administrative, clinical or operational role, your story can contribute to building connections that help others to understand how we can collectively work toward a healthier planet for healthier people.

Many supervisors, leadership teams and executive boards also depend on stories to move projects forward and to increase funding opportunities, making storytelling an important tool for communicating the facts and experiences that shape your health care organization.



Reshaping our narratives

Deepening the resilience of our communities

Narratives expand our empathy and shape the way we think about the world. Stories can help us to envision how we are contributing to a changing planet and the responsibility we have to improve our stewardship practices.

When we tell our stories, we invite audiences to think about their connections to climate. Stories can open up space for people to consider how to use their voices, perspectives, and positions within their communities to create positive change.

Stories also shape the way we think about people—along with their cultural backgrounds, languages, ethnicities, physical abilities, sexual orientations, geographic locations, social and economic statuses, levels of education, and inherent privileges or lack thereof.

How we tell stories can impact how audiences perceive the individuals and communities we talk about, and it's important that we consider the potential impacts of the narratives we choose to tell. As storytellers, we need to think about the narratives we highlight, and whom these stories are serving.

Climate change affects the health of our communities in every place on Earth. These challenges require diverse solutions and immediate actions that cannot be solved by government policy alone.

We ask you to help build narratives in climate, resilience, and health to both inspire and empower others to become advocates for planetary health and to confront the climate crisis together.



"Climate change is a medical emergency: The health care sector has a moral mandate to respond and the power to be a tipping point towards a better future." —Health Care Without Harm

Connecting our work to climate, health and resilience



"Our mission is to transform health care worldwide so that it reduces its environmental footprint and becomes an anchor for sustainability and a leader in the global movement for environmental health and justice." —Practice Greenhealth

Our health depends on the health of our planet. Understanding how our interconnections with the changing environment affect our health is critical to our profession.

Human activities are disrupting the planet's natural systems, which then impact the health of people around the world—our patients, our communities, and our planet. This field of research, 'planetary health', connects our health and environment, understanding that if we improve one, we will improve the other as well.

Whether it is pharmaceutical waste poisoning our waterways, anesthetic gas emissions or environmental health services workers being exposed to harmful chemicals, it is evident that many facets of our health care systems need to change.

As contributors to climate change and professionals in the health care system, we must work together to shape a new narrative. It is our responsibility to help build resilient communities and support social and ecological restoration by embedding sustainability practices into health care operations.

By sharing our stories, we work to improve health at individual, communal, and global levels, leading to broader societal transformation, community resilience and mitigating the impact of health care institutions.



Learn more about climate-smart health care:

[Health Care Without Harm](#)
[Practice Greenhealth](#)



HOW

"I only feel angry when I see waste. When I see people throwing away things we could use."

—Mother Teresa

Get inspired

1

As you begin to think about the story you want to tell, explore similar stories from the field that grab your attention.

Stories to read:

- [Driving down emissions through fleet strategy](#)
- [For hospitals, 'plant-forward' means big sales and a cooler planet](#)
- [Healing patients and planet with 1 cost-saving anesthesia adjustment](#)
- [Nurse inspires students to address climate change and health equity](#)
- [Operating room nurses repurpose blue wrap for those in need](#)
- [Physician profiles: Taking action to promote climate-smart health care](#)
- [Nurse climate champion profiles](#)

Videos to watch:

- [Health voices for climate action](#)
- [Nurses climate challenge](#)

Podcast stories to listen to:

- [Nurses for healthy environments](#)

Take a moment to consider the following questions:

Whom do you help by telling this story?

*What are the power dynamics in your story? Whose perspective is highlighted?
Are their voices in your workplace that often get left out, which you could include?*

Do you have consent from the story subjects to share this story?

How does the story represent your health care organization or community?

2

Connect to the bigger picture

Take a moment to think about how your personal narrative fits within a universal story.

Climate change is caused by all people, so each individual has a part to play in improving their stewardship practices.

While you begin brainstorming your story, start by drawing connections between your story and those of similar efforts elsewhere.

For example, if you are taking steps to eliminate plastic waste at your site, how is your work part of a bigger movement to improve how waste is handled worldwide? If you are advocating for renewable energy in the design and construction process at your hospital, how do these efforts compare to other institutions?

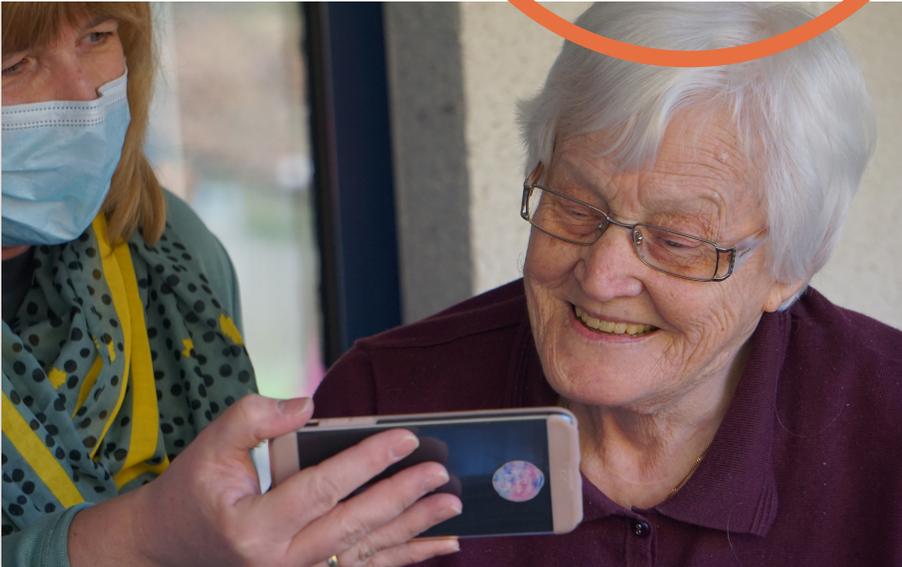
Make space for your audience to reflect on how the success of your story is amplified when other health care professionals take on similar missions to tackle the same universal challenges.



Consider your audience



Determine who you are writing for and how you want them to respond.



Learn about your target audience. What are their values? Where do they live? What is their age range? Are you aware of their cultural background? Do they work in the medical field, or elsewhere?

Considering the demographics and values of your audience will not only make your story more accessible, but it will also increase the impact of what you share.

Once you narrow down your audience, think about how you want them to respond. Are you hoping to stir people to action? Do you want to increase awareness about a complex issue? Are you hoping for a change in perspective?

Establishing the purpose of your story will help you to frame what information you choose to share as you craft your narrative.

Contact the communications team at your workplace and find out which sharing platforms are best suited to your audience—a newsletter, social media platform, or other internal and external channels. Knowing where and how you want to share your story will help you determine which text lengths to consider and what types of visual elements to explore.



4

Write your story

Start your first draft.

Create a brainstorm map.

Make note of the events in the story that are necessary to get your message across. Identify the key players and short descriptions of them.

Use accessible language.

Although scientific jargon may be familiar to you and your team, using complex terminology may lose some audience members who don't possess the same vocabulary. If using particular jargon is essential to telling your story, simply define the terms you're using within your story so that your audience can make sense of the relevant terms.

Appeal to your audience's emotions.

While facts and data can validate your work and can certainly be included in your narrative, expressing the impact you've made by focusing on the people and places involved will help audiences better understand why your work matters.

Give your key players a voice.

By adding dialogue into your story, your audience will better connect with the people involved in your initiative. Just make sure you have permission to quote them.

Recall the response you want to get from your audience and plan how you want to achieve this.

For example, if you want to call people to action, describe what steps people can take to participate in your mission.



Now that you've drafted your story, add visual elements to increase your audience's engagement with the impact of your story.

Show them the key players and story settings through photography, give your colleagues a voice through video and explain difficult concepts with icons and infographics that are central to your work.

"The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, storytellers, and lovers of all kinds."

—The Dalai Lama

5

Incorporate photography

Enhance your story with memorable, bright imagery.

2 Find a well-lit location in the environment where your story takes place. For example, if your story takes place at your hospital's cafeteria, explore possible backgrounds in that area.

4 If there are props that help to tell the story, place them in the background, or in the hands of the person(s) in the shot.

1 Ask your workplace if there is access to a professional camera or lighting equipment. If not, don't worry! Pick up your smartphone or tablet.

3 When you've found a location you like, have the person or team you'd like to capture stand or sit within the frame. Make sure all faces are better lit than the background to avoid shadows.

5 Take a variety of photos. Having landscape and portrait options, as well as candid and posed, will give you more flexibility to choose from when you're putting your story together.



Photos with people typically attract more attention than photos of interior or exterior spaces without them.

Capture video



You might find that your story is better suited to a video. If so, practice how you tell your story to draw your audience into the events that shaped it.

1 Take a moment to jot down the main points of the story you want to tell. Memorize your main points, but not the exact words. This will make your story sound natural rather than rehearsed.

3 Mark your climax. Build up to the main point in your story and use simple, natural gestures to emphasize the most important moments you want to get across.

5 Invite someone else into the room and have them listen to your story. Ask them how it made them feel, and what stood out for them. If they're responding to your story the way you hoped, you're ready to record it.

2 Consider how you want your audience to feel when they hear your story, and adjust your tone, word emphasis, and facial expressions accordingly.

4 Practice your story a few times out loud. Make sure you're not speaking too quickly or too slowly, and that you are delivering your words with clarity and crisp enunciation.

 If you're preparing for an elevator pitch, consider the same talking tips, but aim to keep your story to 20-30 seconds.



When you're ready to film your story, set up the shot and hit record.



Pick up your smartphone, tablet, camera, or video recorder.



Locate a quiet and nicely lit spot. Ensure your face is better lit than your background. If you don't have access to professional lighting, sit facing a window so the natural light brightens your complexion.



Turn off any background noise. If possible, close any doors to minimize disruptive sounds.



Prop up your camera using a tripod, and position in landscape mode. If you don't have access to a tripod, you can use a stack of books on top of a desk to steady your camera.



Place yourself in the center of the shot. You can stand or sit, but make sure the camera is focusing on your head and shoulders rather than your full body.



When you're ready, look just beyond the camera and hit record. Tell your story. You can always re-record your video until you feel confident in sharing it.



If you're telling your story with sign language, consider enhancing your facial expressions and gestures to accentuate key moments.

Include icons & infographics

7

Your story might include a complex idea or system that is hard to understand – consider including icons or infographics to visually explain the concept.

Connect with a graphic designer directly or search for an infographic maker site that suits your needs.

Infographic =
Information + graphics

An infographic gives an easy-to-understand overview of a complex idea or system by using imagery, charts, and minimal text.



If you choose to create your own infographic, make a list of key aspects of the complex idea you are trying to explain with visuals. Summarize them into a few, bold words. Keep it simple.



Select 3-4 relevant icons that represent your key words.



If you have data, include a graph or chart that is easy to read.

Check out these sites:



- [Canva](#)
- [Venngage](#)
- [PiktoChart](#)



Use icons and infographics in social media posts to spark interest in new audiences.



8

Prescribe your story

Let's get your story out there.



Adjust the length and visual content of your story to suit multiple channels. For example, if you've written a blog post, consider pulling out one or two engaging and surprising phrases to highlight your story in a social media post as well.



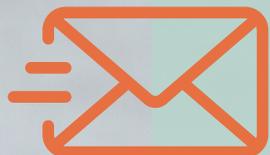
Make sure you have written consent to use any photos, interviews, or video recordings that are featured in your story.



Contact the communications team at your workplace and find out which outputs you can use to publish your story. It might be a good fit for a newsletter, social media platform, or other internal and external channels.



Alternatively, share your story directly through social media platforms, online forums, and other networks where your target audience can be reached.



Health Care Without Harm would love to help you share your story.

To reach a wider network, submit your story to:

stories@hcwh.org