

For Sweeter Dreams  
Vicki Grace Boguszewski, MPH

For Sweeter Dreams

Elaine had been singing since she was seven and loved the fact that she would be supporting preemie babies and their families with her gift; that didn't stop the butterflies fluttering in her belly as she opened the door to South Dade Community Hospital. She knew the facility had been serving the community, a population of black and brown people with low incomes and high rates of chronic diseases like diabetes, asthma, COPD, and addiction, for over 60 years; however, she was the first artist to join one of its care teams. A new Director of Health Services and Community Engagement had opened the opportunity for interprofessional teams to invite artists to work with them under an endowment the Hospital recently received to develop and sustain an Arts in Health program. As she walked through, this new Director waited for her just inside at the admissions desk ahead. Her neat, relaxed appearance, broad smile and outstretched hand told Elaine she was welcomed, before Mrs. Veronica Davis said the same.

"Welcome to our Community Hospital Ms. Jenkins. Please join me for a chat and a chance to put on PPE before I show you the way to the area where you will work today." Mrs. Davis led Elaine to a more private sitting area around the corner and motioned for her to have a seat. Elaine had taken the bus, then walked a few blocks, and welcomed the chance to relax a moment before meeting with her first patient-participants for the first time.

"I understand today is your first AHI session, don't be nervous. I am sure your graduate training prepared you well to share your creative gift in the healthcare setting. We are really looking forward to your participation as a member of the interprofessional team. Our doctors are excited to hear how things go today and begin making regular referrals for this particular population."

"I originally started working as a Director of Health Services and managing an arts in health program when I worked in Sacramento. The program I ran at the King County Medical Center was very successful in enhancing experiences and results for artists, patients, and our staff members. After about eight years there, I transferred to a health center in Detroit and developed a new Program from the ground up; much like this one. I maintained it about three years and recently trained the first artist who worked in it as my replacement, so that I could come here and see the Program off to a sustainable start. I, we all, are so grateful for the endowment the Hospital received."

"I know our patients will find joy in the experience today and am certain the psycho-neuro-immune benefits for the infant will strengthen her mother's hope, and that will promote her best chance of survival. We're so pleased you are here, Elaine."

"Do you have any questions for me?"

Elaine breathed deeply and counted slowly as she released her diaphragm and breath. She was less nervous and more anxious to get started. Overall, she felt safe, secure, and ready to share the best of herself. The confidence of the Director, and knowing she had the support and faith of the care team behind her, strengthened Elaine; she felt empowered to flow creatively.

"Thank you, Director Davis, no. I understand the patient is a young, first-time Mom, and had struggled with addiction for a few years before becoming pregnant. I learned also, that although her baby is premature and of a low birth weight, the Mother was not using substances at the time of the pregnancy and the baby shows no signs of chemical dependency or withdraw. I was told this was a prescreening condition to participate in the Program and used survey information the Mom, Jesynya, provided about her interests and background to choose the songs I will sing today."

"The first two are Moroccan ballads I found in a collection of traditional Moroccan children's songs. I also have two Seminole songs, and one African American spiritual, which Jesynya noted as a favorite her maternal Grandmother sang when she was young. Her grandmother and mother died when

For Sweeter Dreams  
Vicki Grace Boguszewski, MPH

she was nine. In the survey Jesynya noted how much she missed them, and that this song always brought their spirits close to her. I was glad to have this information and to be able to include this for Jesynya.”

Mrs. Davis smiled, “Thank you, Elaine. That is wonderful; your research background was the primary reason I chose you from the singers available to be our Artist in Residence for this pilot program. Are you ready to meet Jesynya and her baby?”

“Yes.”

Mrs. Davis led Elaine down a hallway to the patient’s room, after Elaine washed in the staff restroom and put on the protective personal equipment (PPE), including shoe coverings and bags for her equipment.

“Here we are.” She smiled and waved as she walked back toward the lobby they had left.

Elaine knocked, and heard a faint and anxious, “Please come in.”

The baby lay swaddled in a bassinette at Mom’s side. Mom looked tired and scared as she slid her hands into the openings in the side of the baby’s bed to touch her daughter and hold her tiny hands. Elaine knew the baby had been born weighing just two pounds and two ounces. She was now up to four pounds and three ounces; she needed to reach five pounds and maintain it for a week before her family could bring her home. Mom was sitting in a large, plush chair by her bedside and smiled as Elaine entered.

Elaine smiled and spoke softly as she introduced herself. As she spoke, telling Jesynya that she planned to sing for her and her baby, she felt the woman’s spirit begin to relax right away.

She said she was relieved that Elaine had not come with any medical procedure or process to discuss or perform. The young woman smiled nervously as she reached into the bassinette and lifted her baby to herself. She turned the child toward the musician as Elaine was setting up her device to play the recorded accompanying music.

“I had never heard of arts in health programs before and was uncertain what Director Davis had planned for us. I want to take my baby home more than anything though, so even though I was unsure what to expect or what I would have to do, Director Davis reminded me how much singing had been a part of my family at one time and if she thinks it can help Lillia grow stronger, I will definitely try it and give my best.”

“Actually, I feel better already, just thinking about listening to some music. It was music that drew me to the club scene, which ultimately led me to a rehab. But music brought my Moroccan grandparents the most joy at all of our family gatherings. They were so happy and being around them made our whole family feel safe and . . .”, she hesitated, “Strong, I guess. We felt strong because we were together, we could count on each other and on them.” She looked far away for a moment and the tiredness seemed to be the only thing holding her together.

“They loved to sing, and to dance; unfortunately, after they passed away, my Father did not maintain their enthusiasm. He and his mother would sing to me as a child and I realized today that I can’t remember the last time I heard my Father sing. My mother has been gone so long, her singing only comes to me in dreams now. Sometimes I wake up sweating from a dream where my Mother is trying to sing and cannot remember the words. I want my baby to love music too; I just want it to be easier for her.”

Elaine’s heart leapt, she knew she had selected the right songs and was ready to share what she had prepared. She started the music and began to breath in rhythm with it. She could see the baby slightly turn her head toward the new sounds. Jesynya closed her eyes and pulled the baby in close, as Elaine went through the first and second songs.

For Sweeter Dreams  
Vicki Grace Boguszewski, MPH

During the third song, a Native American lullaby, Jesynya started to hum along and rock her baby back and forth. During the fourth song, laden with heavy hypnotic drumming and willowing flutes, the Mother-Baby unit seemed to have become one again. They moved in a rhythm all their own led by the music.

Jesynya began, at first, mouthing the words to the fifth song and by the second verse she was singing the chorus with Elaine. Together they sang the last song twice and afterward promised to do that one at the close of each of their sessions. Jesynya's smile was radiant as she lay her child in the bassinette, smoothed the swaddling blankets, and began to applaud. She thanked Elaine and wiped tears from her cheek with one finger. Jesynya smiled, reached back into the bassinette to pick up her child and hug her close.

"Thank you for taking time to choose songs that related to my family and my background. I feel I have the strength of my ancestors behind me and hope you will be able to come again on Wednesday to see us."

"You're welcome, Jesyna. I will see you Wednesday", said Elaine as she packed up her equipment. She smiled deeply inside as she left the room and looked back on the young mother whispering lullabies to the tiny pink-brown baby wrapped in her arms.