

Milestones and Momentum: JHR's Decade of Humanistic Progress and the Crossroads Ahead

By Ruth Purtilo, PhD

Dear Reader,

A decade ago, I contributed [this editorial](#) to an early edition of the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation (JHR)*, the first peer-reviewed, online interdisciplinary publication focused on defining the intersection of humanities and rehabilitation in healthcare. While I leapt at the chance, since the journal spoke to issues close to my heart, I never imagined the high degree of success this publication would realize through the leadership of founding editor [Dr. Sarah Blanton](#).

Dr. Blanton's vision to include leadership voices from the disability community in its published articles immediately enriched the journal's depth and scope. It generated high-quality contributions from scholars in healthcare and the humanities alongside those in the disability community, social sciences, and applied arts.

Success on all these fronts has been every bit welcome, but it has created an ongoing challenge: to continue *JHR's* mission and expand its impact worldwide, its growth requires a corresponding adjustment in resource allocation. The quality and quantity of

submissions continue to grow, which in turn makes it necessary to increase staff numbers. And to continue to expand *JHR's* burgeoning readership in the humanities, healthcare sector, disability scholarship, and social sciences also requires additional dedicated staff.

Today, still the sole journal of its kind, *JHR* is an increasingly cited publication valued by readers, educators, practitioners, and researchers throughout the United States and in more than 140 countries worldwide.

JHR in Academia

As part of its mission to expand the integration of health humanities into rehabilitation science education, the journal provides unique digital humanities training opportunities for interdisciplinary students. In addition to gaining skills in academic publishing, these students deliver national conference presentations, serve as graduate student ambassadors, and compete for

awards honoring humanism in rehabilitation. Now in its seventh year, *JHR* collaborated with the American Council of Academic Physical Therapy (ACAPT) to sponsor the first national student essay contest addressing humanities in rehabilitation and healthcare.

JHR in the Disability Community

Fundamental to this work is the elevation of diverse voices. Guided by the lived experience of the disability community to inform and co-create content, the journal seeks to be a public humanities initiative. This approach has the potential to influence federal funding opportunities, support community-engaged research, and enhance more humanistic and equitable clinical care. Because *JHR* is a diamond-access publication that does not charge for submissions or subscriptions, this model eliminates traditional academic publication paywalls and supports inclusivity and engagement. With more than 230 articles in 19 issues, averaging 3.9k monthly readership internationally, *JHR* has demonstrated a lasting impact during its first decade.

A New Development Phase

The journal seeks to build on this success and transition to a development phase focused on sustainability and growth. Transitioning through this phase requires building the necessary and robust infrastructure that can sustain the initiative over time, increase confidence among stakeholders, and maximize impact.

Why Is This Phase Important Now?

Given the increased reliance on technology and business models in healthcare that prioritize efficiency and profitability over patient-centered care, a health humanities lens is increasingly essential to preserve humanistic care. This depersonalization not only negatively impacts patient outcomes but is also a primary driver of clinician burnout and moral injury. Maintaining a publication that leverages health humanities scholarship to promote principles of humanistic care, critical interrogation of the healthcare environment, and disability justice advocacy is more important than ever.

With a focus on development and growth, the journal can support the expansion of the editorial board to include members of the disability community as paid staff to help shape the vision of *JHR*; support a co-editor model that brings together the needed expertise of a health humanities scholar with a rehabilitation science editor; and broaden and formalize collaborations with other health science professionals, including medicine and nursing, as well as occupational and speech therapy.

What Are Our Next Steps?

To date, Emory University has generously provided initial seed-funding to develop, launch, and continuously publish *JHR*. Building broader community engagement and support for this work is crucial to expanding the journal's reach and impact. Developing a sustainable business model that is committed to accessibility and inclusivity requires

collaboration across the rehabilitation community to support this shared mission.

What Can JHR's Next Steps Look Like?

- Philanthropic support from donors dedicated to humanism in rehabilitation could enable an endowed editor-in-chief position, providing protected time for both rehabilitation and humanities scholars with co-editorial roles, and enlarging student scholarship funds or the student essay contest.
- Interprofessional engagement by sharing *JHR* with colleagues will encourage new and expanded collaborative scholarship in the health humanities.
- ACAPT Academies publications can work with *JHR* as a “supplementary archive” for humanistic content that extends and enriches their existing articles with the lived experiences of the disability community, research participants, and clinicians. Investment in this publication partnership will allow *JHR* to be a benefit of ACAPT Academies membership, broadening their exposure and reaching new readers.
- Health science educational program partnerships with *JHR* can support the continued creation of content to integrate health humanities into their curricula and

cultivate student development through editorial roles. Aligning with *JHR* creates avenues to strengthen their clinical partnerships by using the journal to foster clinical educator professional growth and scholarship skills.

- “Humanism in Business” corporate sponsorships provided by companies dedicated to a more humanistic lens can underscore the value for investing in more holistic, patient-centered care approaches.

Helping to Bring Humanities to Healthcare

I urgently invite you to join a number of donors committed to building on *JHR*'s signal strengths. Your contribution today will help prevent our losing, at this critical juncture, the gains we have made in the launching and nurturing of *JHR*'s mission. Together, we can help build bridges to a more enlightened, humanities-based healthcare environment.

Please review my editorial attached to this note and add your own insights to the reasons for our combined commitment to realizing the value of the humanities to our collective and individual well-being. Then, if you are moved to do so, please [make a donation](#) to help ensure that the bounty of *JHR* benefits realized so far will continue to mount.

Ruth Purtilo, PhD

About the Author



Ruth Purtilo began her professional career as a physical therapy clinician employed in long-term rehabilitation environments. Her subsequent experience in diverse societal and cultural settings awakened a desire to help prepare health professions students for the larger clinical, social and cultural challenges they would face. One path to such a goal opened through the emerging field of medical ethics. She enrolled in Harvard University Divinity School to complete a master's degree, then transferred to its Graduate School of Arts and Sciences to obtain a PhD. She graduated having gained a solid foundation in religious and philosophic traditions of ethics along with ample exposure to key legal, humanistic and social-sciences studies relevant to healthcare practices and policies.

Her career as a healthcare ethicist—educator, consultant, author and member of several national and international health policy initiatives—now spans over 40 years, many with a focus on rehabilitation. She is professor emerita in Interprofessional Studies at the MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston, where she has served in several capacities and as director of its Ethics Initiative. She is also a professor emerita at Creighton University, Omaha, where she directed the multidisciplinary Center for Health Policy and Ethics.

Dr. Purtilo holds five honorary degrees for her contributions to healthcare ethics. In 1991, she received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Harvard Divinity School; in 1983, she was awarded the Nellie Westerman Prize by the American Federation for Clinical Research for her article predicting major ethical and social issues that the (then) new disease called AIDS would create. She is a Catherine Worthingham Fellow and McMillan Scholar of the American Physical Therapy Association. She has been an awardee of two National Endowment for the Humanities Senior Scholars summer institute awards. She also has received two Greenwall Foundation grants: one to study moral courage among South African health and other professionals during the apartheid years; the other for an international initiative on ethical and philosophic foundations for palliative care in Alzheimer disease.

Dr. Purtilo is the author of six books and more than 100 articles. She is the founding author of two textbooks (which reflect how over time she took on co-authors to help keep important material up-to-date, and to enrich content): *Health Professional and Patient Interaction* (10th ed in prep, Amy Haddad, primary author); and *Ethical Dimensions in the Health Professions* (8th ed in prep, Regina Doherty, primary author).

She is co-editor (with Gail Jensen and Charlotte Royeen) of *Educating for Moral Action: a Sourcebook in Health and Rehabilitation Ethics*, and co-editor (with Henk AMJ ten Have) of *Ethical Foundations of Palliative Care for Alzheimer Disease*. She served as an area editor for the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, revised ed. She is a Fellow of the Hastings Center, an internationally-recognized ethics think-tank in Garrison, New York.